

# TROOPSHIP

BY

LIEUT.-COL. R. A. CHELL,  
D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C.

HOW MANY people reading of the exploits of our Armies in many scattered parts of the globe during the late war have thought much about the voyages to the theatres of war? Of the well organized, careful and secret planning, of the ships themselves and the men who travelled in them; the long days of waiting, with known dangers around and above, and unknown trials ahead and the men whose job it was to look after the troops, to get them safely landed at their destinations and to make the journey itself not only bearable and disciplined but even agreeable, an interval between training and battle to be remembered with pleasure and above all a time when morale must be kept high.

Most of the Troopships employed were Passenger Liners before the war. During the war the ships no longer traversed the recognized routes of their Lines or made their accustomed ports of call. Their paint work had changed colour and they had been armed.

Here is a story told by one of the men who chose the job of O.C. Troopship, who took to the sea and spent most of the second war in charge of a Transport.

This is one of the human stories of the war, told in a simple, soldierly style, of interest to not only those who travelled in Troopships, but to all who are anxious to learn something of this aspect of service during the late war.

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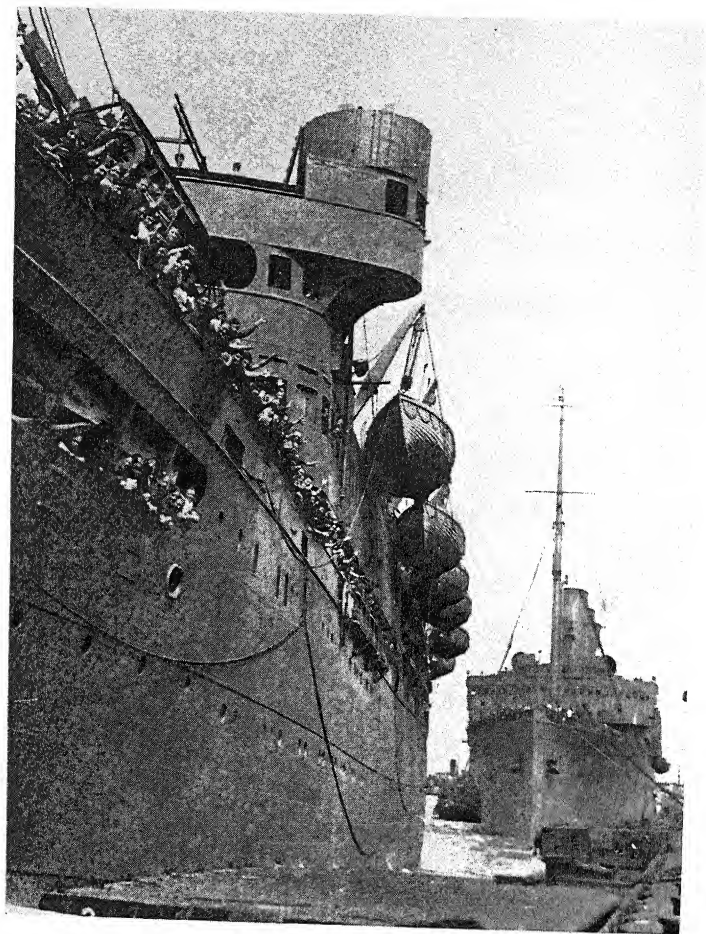
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**TROOPSHIP**



OUTWARD BOUND

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*by*

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL R. A. CHELL,  
D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C.

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## DEDICATION

FOR ALL THOSE WITH WHOM I WENT TO SEA AND IN PARTICULAR  
FOR THE MASTER, OFFICERS AND CREW OF H.M.T. "LETTIE"  
AND MY OWN MOST FAITHFUL "SHIP'S STAFF."



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## FOREWORD

How many people, reading of the exploits of our Armies in many scattered parts of the globe during World War II, have thought much about the voyages to those various fields of operation? Of the well-knit organization, the careful, secret planning; of the ships themselves and the men packed in them; the long, tedious days of waiting, with known dangers around and above, and unknown trials ahead; and the men whose job it was to look after those troops, to get them safely landed at journey's end, to make the travelling itself not only bearable and disciplined but even agreeable, an interval between training and battle to be remembered with pleasure, and above all a time when morale must be kept high? Here is a story told by one of the men who chose this job: an old soldier of World War I who took to the sea and spent most of the second war in charge of a transport. He tells you of many journeys, embarkations, debarkations (one might almost say embunkings and debunkings); of the men of many famous regiments, and men (and sometimes women) of all sorts of mixed units, whom his ship carried; men in whom he took a kindly and paternal interest and whom he treated as human beings; of the days and nights he spent in seeing not only that the vital regulations of the ship were obeyed but that the long hours between sleeping, eating, tidying up and keeping

boat-stations were filled with as many pleasant occupations as possible, games, concerts, quizzes and competitions of all sorts, which served not only as distractions but kept the men's wits from flagging. He remembers, too, with affection the masters whose heavy responsibility it was to get the ships to the other end; and his colleagues who did various essential jobs month after month, like the little Scots cook who spent the war making soup in a row of great boilers, to stir which he had to stand on a platform. This is one of the human stories of the war told in a simple, soldierly style, which will warm every reader's heart.

D. R. O.-H.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I ACKNOWLEDGE with gratitude the permission given me by Mr. Michael Powell and Sir Ralph Richardson to publish their complete burlesque of my daily broadcast ; to many Service men who on various voyages presented me with the cartoons they entered for the Voyage Cartoon Competition, mentioning specially "Baccy" for his apt sketch on page 33, and to Lieut.-Colonel D. R. Oakley-Hill and Captain David Trewby for their help and advice.



## CHAPTER ONE

### SELECTION

A.C.I. 422/42 was one of the most famous of the Adjutant-General's contributions to Army Council Instructions during the first three years of the war. It ordered that every officer aged 45 years and more be reported upon by his immediate superior forthwith. Irregular regimental officers who had passed 55 were, except in most extraordinary circumstances, to be given 42 days' leave and paid off; those between 45 and 55 could be recommended (a) for continuance in present job, (b) other and more suitable employment, (c) finish. I had thirty-two officers in a Home Defence battalion aged more than 45 and I brought the total to thirty-three. At the same time the brigadier told me that my battalion was to be reconstituted as an aerodrome counter-attack unit and all officers must be under 40 years of age.

The time was very ripe for these Instructions and most of us older men who had been of the greatest value in getting things going in the summer and autumn of 1939 had given our all and were spent as officers of the line. Whilst we had been guarding vulnerable points (aerodromes, coast batteries, fuel dumps, etc.) during the first two and a half years of the war we had had neither time nor opportunity to acquire knowledge of this decade's arms and tactics. Armed with aged rifles and Molotov bombs, we had been prepared to do or die; now in early 1942 the next generation was available, well trained and reasonably equipped, and we, their fathers, were put

into jobs compatible with our ages and attainments. All my thirty-two were soon accommodated—many as Home Guard adjutants and quartermasters—and I was in one week given *two* appointments, one by the War Office and one by Command. The War Office won!

On an April morning of 1942 I received an order to attend a War Office Board. It obviously included a medical examination. 1020 hours was my time and rather indicated that there would be others there that morning—and there were. Gaggles of Field Officers sat around in the outer screened-off part of a large basement room in Hobart House. Three or more civilian gentlemen who clearly belonged to the place came in and passed through the screens. The one in charge was short and came into our section and told the Lance-Corporal of the Home Guard to get started. A grand old man this Lance-Corporal: not quite old enough to be my father but a dignified patriarch who knew intimately the intention of the “high-ups” as regards us.

One by one he took us to a far corner and for each one of us he filled in a soldier’s Medical History Sheet—the well-known Army Form B178. “When I have finished with you,” he said, “you go the other side of those screens, take off all your clothes, and go before the doctors. Tell me,” he continued, “when you were last given TAB inoculation.” “May 1916,” I replied (for there had been no vaccine to waste on old Home Defence fogies in 1939-41). This seemed to please him and he put a large tick against TAB. “Vaccination?” “October 1914”—another tick. “But you’ve never had a T.T. (tetanus) squirt, have you?” “Pints of it,” I replied, “when the top of my knee was knocked off near Neuve Eglise in August, 1916.” This delighted him into an extra large tick, and I went in to be examined and to do full knees bend and other jerks. When I had dressed and was waiting for a board of

officers who would see if I was any good for a certain further employment still unnamed, the small senior doctor came out and in passing said to the H.G. Lance-Corporal, "A fine healthy lot this morning." My B178 had a number of large capital A's in the margin by now (and it was nearly time for lunch).

Up in the lift many floors brought another short wait before being sent in alone to face a board of quite ten officers. The president had been my "master" for a considerable time in France during the years '16-'18. He put me at ease at once and said, "I really can't ask this young officer anything; I've known him almost since the day he joined his regiment." So his associates commenced on me: "Have you ever thought of going to sea; of being O.C. Troops?" "No," I said. "I didn't know what we were up for this morning, but I like the sea and am never seasick." That about settled the matter, for a letter of appointment was sent to me the next day. A large number of Os.C. Troops and ships' adjutants were wanted at this particular period, and security demands necessitated no pre-warning as to the purpose of those interviews.

Troops were required urgently in Egypt, and Mr. Churchill and President Roosevelt were already working as so fine a pair that the one could arrange to borrow quite a number of the other's troopships for a few months. In April the U.S. army had relieved ours in Iceland. The American troopships which brought our relieved men back to the United Kingdom thought that they would sail across to Ulster, dump their spare supplies there for the U.S. army already present in Northern Ireland in considerable numbers, and then sail home. Indeed they had expected to be back in America before the end of May. The national leaders deemed otherwise and those ships paid no visit to either Belfast or Derry. Instead they



filled up with British troops at United Kingdom ports and before the end of May were away with many British ships in a huge convoy for the Long Voyage.\*

That is how I came to serve my apprenticeship as O.C. Troops in a 7,500-ton American cargo vessel converted to a troopship but five months before. She could be fast (19 knots) and the cabins on the main deck were luxurious till crowded. The men slept in standee berths in holds built for banana carrying. There were no mess rooms and meals (two only a day) were taken picnic fashion on the after weather decks. Fortunately the weather was kind and in eight weeks rain interfered with only one meal, when breakfast took three and a half instead of the normal two and a half hours.

Troopship work is ideal for the middle-aged officer who loves both soldiers and the sea. Up till the time that we were well into this last war an O.C. Troops for the voyage of any troopship would be appointed from one of the units coming aboard. The appointment was made well in advance and the O.C. Troops and his staff took up their duties in the ship a few days before the main embarkation. Experience showed that in war time and with the expectation of many long voyages (eight weeks or more) greater efficiency and content would result from permanent O.C. Troops with permanent staffs. We had our own books of instructions from the War Office and these were kept up to date. These war-time handbooks plus King's Regulations, Voyage Regulations, the Royal Warrant for Pay, Allowance Regulations, etc., were our terms of reference. In some ways we were maids of all work, but the chief qualifications required were

- (1) Not to be seasick.
- (2) To love long voyages.

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\* From U.K. round the Cape to Egypt.

- (3) To be able to organize quickly.
- (4) To know all the administrative side of regimental soldiering.
- (5) Not to be afraid of considerable financial responsibility and to be expert at money exchange.
- (6) Above all, to love congested and often rather seasick soldiers in the mass.

A convoy of forty ships or more and attractive escort vessels manœuvring is a magnificent sight on a calm, sunny day in mid-ocean, but the average soldier often feels as did the ship's Regimental Sergeant-Major, who said, when going by car from Cape Town to Rondebosch scarcely an hour after our arrival in port, "It's wonderful to be looking at something besides bloody sea!"

The quickest way to put across a day's life in a British Troopship is to print paragraph 1 of Ship's Standing Order, headed "Routine":—

0600 hours—Reveille. Blankets and hammocks rolled and stored. Mattresses stored.

0630 hours—Draw Rations.

0700 hours—Troops' Breakfast.

0700 hours—Sergeants' Breakfast (First Sitting).

0745 hours—Sergeants' Breakfast (Second Sitting).

0745 hours—Officers' and Warrant Officers' Breakfast (First Sitting).

0830 hours—Officers' and Warrant Officers' Breakfast (Second Sitting).

0900 hours—Guard Mounting (Boat Deck, port side).

1000 hours—Boat stations.

1000 hours—Ship's Inspection.

1100 hours—O.C. Troops' Conference.

1130 hours—O.C. Troops' Orders.

- 1145 hours—Sergeants' Dinner (First Sitting).
- 1200 hours—Troops' Dinner.
- 1215 hours—Officers' and Warrant Officers' Lunch (First Sitting).
- 1230 hours—Sergeants' Dinner (Second Sitting).
- 1315 hours—Officers' and Warrant Officers' Lunch (Second Sitting).
- 1600 hours—Draw Rations.
- 1700 hours—Troops' Tea.
- 1700 hours—Sergeants' Tea (First Sitting).
- 1730 hours—Sergeants' Tea (Second Sitting).
- 1800 hours—Officers' and Warrant Officers' Dinner (First Sitting).
- 1900 hours—Officers' and Warrant Officers' Dinner (Second Sitting).
- 2100 hours—Cocoa (Troops only).
- 2215 hours—Lights Out.

When the seasickness of the first few days is over, good food is the best means of keeping the Service passengers happy, and with the Chief Steward's department co-operative, proud of its reputation and working happily with a carefully selected Messing Officer, there were normally few complaints. A busy period of ferrying in, say, the Mediterranean, lasting six months or more without a return to the United Kingdom, found us at different times in dire straits for such varying supplies as potatoes and yeast. When we set out for Sicily in June, 1943, we filled up with potatoes at about £7 a ton. They were of the 1942 crop. During the last fortnight of July we had no troops aboard and temperatures were very high—90° or so in the shade—and humidity great. The potatoes not eaten before the Sicily landing "passed out" during the last few days of July and had to be shovelled over-

board. Then came the problem of restocking and for a time we were on tinned potatoes at £60-odd a ton. More often than not our American Allies in North African ports came to our rescue as regards yeast, and indeed they were consistently good to us in all supply matters.

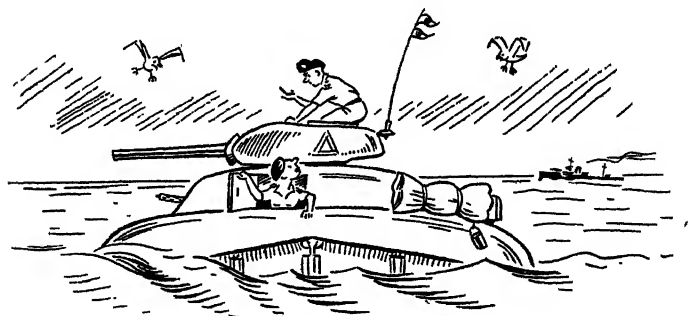
The Routine paragraph from Standing Orders tells of meals, inspections, and boat drills, but of the many other events dovetailed into the sea-day it says nothing. "Break up the day as much as possible," was always the first line of my intentions. Training, arranged primarily by unit commanders, went on without interruption; recreation, supervised by various experts, had pretty clear fields from 1400 hours to Lights Out; educational efforts, whether language class or popular lecture, brains trust or quiz, were our constant delight. Then, of course, there were concert parties (the Americans called them "stage shows"), and occasionally we were lucky enough to carry celebrities who threw themselves heart and soul into the job of making the voyage as happy as possible. In May, 1943, it was our good fortune to have Ralph Richardson, Michael Powell and Judy Shirley aboard on one voyage. Ten other stage celebrities were billed to come too, but in the end they flew. However, these three who were with us for nearly a fortnight did us proud—Judy was around the weather decks those summer evenings on the Atlantic with a soldier accordion player to accompany her, and she sang and sang again. The men were devoted to her. The two men wrote a revue and three days after embarkation were playing to full houses (the largest lounge available) thrice daily.

"Tombola" is the official name for "House" in these latter days, but the old tags remain and troopships have been resounding with shouts of "Kelly's eye," "Clickety-click," "Legs-eleven" throughout these war years. It

was an ever-popular game with all Services, all classes and both sexes. I found the Wrens particularly able at forming and running syndicates, but the French bookie who, coming away from Gibraltar in February, 1943, tried to run six cards at a time, was the greatest exponent of self-confidence I have ever met.

Very few passengers in war time get a close view of the Master unless the ship puts into an intermediate port and he can "ease off" for a day or two whilst she lies there, but he is responsible for everything and everybody and is, in my experience, as delightful as he is capable. An O.C. Troops must be a great go-between. At one hour he is acting as a non-denominational bishop holding a chapter of fourteen to twenty (passenger) chaplains, at the next he is down deep in No. 5 hold watching various men and the ship's terrier deal with rats. Welfare, liaison, currency, exchange, diplomacy, messing, courier work, entertainments, education, religious services, summary justice—they must all receive adequate and competent attention from him.

It is a very full and a grand life.



[Drawn by Bacey]

#### ALL AT SEA

*"I say sir, are you sure we are on the right bearing?  
That is the fourth destroyer we have passed!"*

## CHAPTER TWO

### EMBARKATION AND SETTLING-IN

"THE first train load of 550 bodies will be arriving at 0345 hours tomorrow. There is no moon and snow is forecast."

Thus spoke the E.S.O. (Embarkation Staff Officer) at our Embarkation Conference on a cold January day in 1943 on a ship lying alongside in King George V Dock, Glasgow.

After nine months I was still jarred by Movement Control officials almost consistently referring to passengers of all Services (and ranks) as "bodies." (Before I left the sea the practice was almost a universal pleasantry. "Nine score Greek political bodies for you at Massawa," an Aden boarding officer might say—and very intelligent and courteous those Greeks were.)

Not only snow but some fog made the early morning embarkations most uncomfortable that following winter morning. But our complement of passengers was made up mainly of three excellent units; and the chief steward was a wizard of efficiency and kindness.

Mess decks cannot but vary greatly in capacity: one may take 480, another 130. The great thing in berthing is to have only one deck of mixed units—the various "overs." As one descends the companionway to a mess deck one sees painted on the bulkhead a legend like this:

## C/4 MESS DECK.

Hammocks ...	...	189
Messing ...	...	240

You ask where the 51 slept? They were our "hard-liers"; two on each mess table, some on the emptied hammock racks, the remainder on the deck (floor). By the summer of 1944 we had an extra sleeping space made by sliding a dog-eared plank between the fixed forms of the mess tables. Hard-liers had a mattress apiece and a minimum of two blankets.

The details of an embarkation are many: the passengers must be guided to their quarters, security must be maintained, a hot meal as soon as possible after arrival is just ordinarily human and decent, the best possible use must be made of any cabins available. Here is heartburn and headache—often intense. Sergeants always are embarked third class, warrant officers second. If there are  $2x$  first-class cabin berths and only  $x$  first-class passengers, the warrant officers "go up one" for accommodation, and many sergeants can be berthed in cabins too.

Everything possible is done to make full use of all that is going spare. The shipping company, I am told, is responsible for guides, and I was on a ship for a long time where several stewards put in the whole of embarkation day as guides to the troops—and good guides they were—but guides are generally part of a unit's advance party.

A troop deck is hardly a home from home at the best of times and on embarkation day it can easily become a noisy mêlée: twenty men to a table, ten each side. They are led in and told to sit down and fix themselves up as a "mess" for the voyage. But unless they can quickly get their packs off and stow these and their other belongings in the latticed wooden racks above the table, the men

for the next table can't get in! Each table is called a "mess" and each mess has its number. By 1800 hours of the evening of embarkation day there must be a nominal roll of every mess in the ship's orderly room.

As soon as embarkation was completed I held a conference of Unit Commanders (this was really the Chief Officer's conference, but in my experience he sent the Troop Officer and Chief Steward and let the O.C. Troops run it), and broadcast to the whole complement of Service passengers. A broadcast system on a transport, if not abused, is invaluable. Once or twice when the system was out of action and I had to shout a security talk on thirteen different mess decks—a two-hour job at least—I was almost converted from my deep-rooted dislike of all modern mechanical and electrical gadgets.

The various masters under whom I served were extremely helpful and courteous about the broadcast system; for, primarily, it was installed to entertain the crew. By my keeping as far as possible to regular hours, the crew knew what programmes would be missing, and passengers knew when to listen for "parish notices" and the daily talk.

Here is a typical "first broadcast of a voyage," and I hope it will make many things to do with the passengers' life on a troopship in war time vivid to you. This one is dated May, 1943:—

"Normally I broadcast at 1710 hours each day, and from tomorrow onwards 1710 will be the hour. This is done to suit you. I wish you all to hear what I have to say, and if I talk to you whilst you are having your tea you are saved a parade. Officers will make a point of being in the vicinity of a loud-speaker at my broadcast hour. Occasionally there are matters of such importance to speak about that my broadcast must be a parade. I do



not order this unless necessary, and, ordinarily, leave it to your good sense to hear my daily talk.

"What a wonderful time in the Empire's history to be setting out on a great adventure like this! How many still in England will be envying you!

"First, on behalf of the Master and his officers, as well as of my staff and myself, I bid you welcome to the ship. We are keen to make your voyage a happy and successful one, and view our duty of delivering officers and men of the Services to the various zones of activity as a vocation. We are old hands at the job—our paths are on the seas—and we are here to do all that we can for you. You on your part must resolve to fit in, co-operate, and be helpful. My staff and I have been on many voyages, and feel mature as sailors, but are infants in arms compared with the Master and many of his officers and crew.

"This is the Master's second war as regards H.M. transports—he was at the Gallipoli landings in 1915 and at the evacuation; he has been at sea all this war. I wish he had time to talk to you occasionally. We best help him in his very onerous task by good behaviour, and particularly by being quiet at night. I hope to get some of the ship's officers to talk to you. You can learn a lot from them, and, in particular, how to behave if the ship is unfortunate enough to bump into something.

"'Voyages on transports,' say our instructions from the Prime Minister himself, 'must be regarded as operations of war, with all their attendant hardships.' In January, 1942, all transports were instructed to carry 30 per cent. more troops than they had ever carried before. Where 1,000 had been the complement, 1,300 were embarked. This increase had a great effect in getting the Eighth Army into its stride, and I myself shall ever be proud that I had a tiny part in getting some of the 44th Division to Egypt in the middle of last year. It was a

long voyage, and troops had only two meals a day, which they had to eat picnic fashion from their mess-tins whilst squatting on weather decks and hatches. They kept remarkably fit all the way, and just look at what they have done since last October. We are packed here, but compared with that ship, and many others in the May convoy last year, our conditions are palatial. You are, since embarkation, in the battle, so KEEP FIT. . . .

"Probably quite a number of you have not been on a voyage of any length before, and are thinking and worrying a bit about both seasickness and U-boats. DON'T—it's no help. Take German planes. I have been at sea thirteen months, and so far have not seen a single one. On two voyages during the last six months we had such smooth seas that for the first six days out only six men out of our whole complement were sick. Those voyages were, I know, exceptional, and we are not so lucky always, but resolution, regular feeding, and above all the maximum time in the fresh air, are the ways to set about being a good sailor.

"We defeat the U-boat menace chiefly by our own personal discipline. First, our black-out must be 100 per cent. The glimmer of light at the side of your kitchen window, about which the A.R.P. warden says nothing, won't do here. Black-out hours are printed daily in Routine Orders, exhibited in the Purser's Square, and I proclaim them in my daily broadcast. During these hours of black-out, no one must smoke, strike a match, or shine a torch on a weather deck. One match or glowing cigarette may give away the position of a whole convoy, occasion the loss of thousands of lives, and many valuable ships, and thus put back our victory by months. If you have a torch, put it right away. I served with a General in the last war who forbade torches (except for reading and writing messages and orders), and I have

never ceased being grateful to him for the terrific training he gave me. Don't do silly things subconsciously. On this ship those who offend black-out are treated primarily as lunatics: they are locked up in the cells instantly.

"Don't throw anything overboard. Garbage dumping is done under ship's arrangements once every twenty-four hours. Trails of garbage are as bad as lights in giving away the existence and position of a convoy. Smoking on mess decks is strictly forbidden. We can't smoke so much at sea as we do on land; that will do you no harm but will help to get you a bit fitter for your real job. A fire at sea is a dreadful thing, and there have been too many this war. . . . No slackness, then, as regards lighted cigarette ends and matches.

"... It is not easy successfully and happily to administer a ship closely packed with so large a number of units and drafts. To make anything of it one has to get a tremendous move on on embarkation day. By 2200 hours tonight we shall be printing lists of commands and commanders, and of all temporary appointments—*e.g.*, Messing Officer, Education Officer, Entertainments Officer, and so on.

"The disappearance of all lounges bar one—which was kept solely because we must have conferences during voyages—makes evening entertainment in the winter most difficult. But it is summer in the Northern Hemisphere now and during this voyage we hope to have a cinema giving three shows daily. I am not at this stage attempting to go into details regarding entertainment. Tomorrow, after I have had a talk with your Entertainments Officer, I shall have a lot to say—pay attention to the Parish Notices; concerts, cinema, brains trust, quiz, tombola, and so on are possible, and have been popular on previous voyages. We shall do our best; mind you play. Those of you who can do something for others,

be ready with your names and capabilities tomorrow morning.

"Normally, Boat Stations and Ship's Inspection occur at 1000 hours every morning. Tomorrow is the ship's first inspection by the Sea Transport Officer (S.T.O.) and others. For that you must all be sitting at your mess tables, properly dressed and each wearing a life jacket. I know you will put up a good show.

"Boat Stations are most important and there will be a practice at 2100 hours tonight. You will wear greatcoats, hats and life-jackets. . . . The first practice takes some time as you cannot be dismissed until the Ship's Officers and myself are satisfied that every one of you knows his station, how to tie on his life-jacket, etc. Carry your emergency ration in one greatcoat pocket, a full water-bottle in the other. Boat stations parade is not put on to irritate you; it is put on to get you doing the right thing automatically whenever an alarm goes. Make a good thing of it. It is your own life you endanger unnecessarily by not taking care. Each one of you will familiarize himself with the route and exit to his boat station by individual practice, particularly at night.

"Ship's Inspection, which is also at 1000 hours, is the other voyage ceremonial. . . . It is just as easy and so much more comfortable and healthy to live clean and tidy. I don't want eyewash: I go round this ship in the middle of every night to get a real view of things. . . .

"I have, by order, to speak to you all about Security, although I am certain that you already know quite as much about it as I do. It is, when correctly observed, one of our biggest weapons in beating the enemy, and so like black-out (which is part of security too) must be 100 per cent. Now you are on this ship you can't go off and you must make no attempt whatever to get any note or message ashore. You have only one means of com-

munication and that is the green envelope with which you were issued when you came aboard. In this you may place three letters—unsealed and undated. Then you seal up the green envelope and address it to the Base Censor. . . . You must say nothing in those letters which could be of the slightest use to the enemy. When I was with the American troops last October and November they were allowed to write no letters at all. That is the foolproof way of handling the matter. British troops are terrific letter writers, and I am all for anything which gives pleasure and happiness to good Service men and their relatives. But play the game—it's all part of beating the Boche.

"The Canteen Square is at the end of 'A' Deck. It is about the size of a small village store. To help you and to reduce queuing to a minimum I have arranged for daily deck issues of tobacco, cigarettes and sweets. Your Commanders will hear all about the details of this in a few minutes' time. Canteen means patience and the spirit of give and take between one man and another.

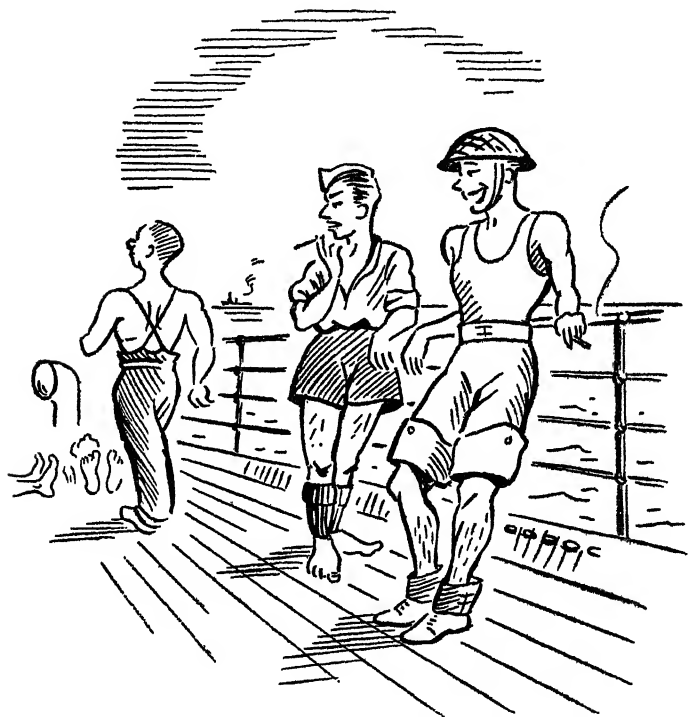
"News will be broadcast twice daily, and this voyage we hope to produce a news-sheet (we have a young sub-editor among us).

"P.T. will be done by all officers and men under 40 years of age for twenty minutes daily.

"Library books will be placed on every mess deck tonight, and an N.C.O. made responsible for them on each deck. These books are for use by you and by the generations of Service passengers who follow you. Treat them decently. I want to minimize red tape and queues and that is why I won't have a central library, but give each mess deck a dose. You can keep the books until the last possible moment. You play your part by careful use and by complete return on the last day.

"Keep carefully the newspapers you have brought on

today and send them to me tomorrow. I shall sort them and tidy them, tie them in assorted bundles and see that 'out somewhere' they reach British ratings, troops and airmen who mayn't have seen a home paper for months. I have been able on recent voyages to give newspapers to Service folk who haven't seen a home paper for four months. See what you can do to help here."



[Drawn by G. E. Salter, R.E.]

*Have the variations of dress produced "fashions"?*

## CHAPTER THREE

### NORTH AFRICAN INVASION

It is impossible to start this chapter without the now trite observation that with the British offensive in Egypt and Allied landings in North Africa (October-November, 1942), the initiative in World War II passed from the Axis to the Allies.

My staff and I had been on the Long Voyage that summer, and the troops of the 44th Division we had carried were already deployed for action near El Alamein, when my R.S.M. and myself were put aboard a 15,000-ton British troopship in the Firth of Clyde to act in a liaison capacity to U.S. troops and naval drafts. Security was terrific, and the Master was a little worried lest his ship, built for North Atlantic work (Glasgow—Halifax), be sent to the tropics. Before we sailed he was assured that he hadn't to cross the Line, but I don't think he knew much more, and we victualled for many weeks. Quite a number of British Os.C. Troops and R.S.Ms. went to the North African invasion as liaison officers with units of the U.S. Services, and I imagine that they all had as happy and interesting times as my R.S.M. and myself. In December, 1942, on my second return from North Africa, my security sense reached so high a pitch that I burnt my logs in the huge kitchen range in the ship's galley. But I can remember several chapters of incidents, and will sort out the best from my memory.

The experience of being O.C. Troops to British units on an American troopship from May to July was of great use now. American and U.K. palates differ much more than you might expect, and in long voyages the results of these differences can be somewhat aggravated (and aggravating!). Our men certainly have no use for sauerkraut and olives, or for coffee as a complete substitute for tea; American soldiery has little use either for fish or mutton. Moreover, "enlisted men" like to deal individually with the galley; "other ranks" are quite happy and at home with our well-established "family feeding." In the latter the two mess orderlies for a mess of twenty draw all the food in the vessels provided (standard pattern throughout British troopships). They go to a galley for this, and are lined up by an expert troop deck steward who belongs to the ship's staff. They may beat a gentle tattoo on the bottom of their dixies and large coffee cans whilst waiting in the alleyway leading to the galley—but all in good fun. With the family system and two galleys, breakfast for 3,000 can be issued easily in half an hour. With the American cafeteria system my record time for 2,000 feeding from one galley was two hours and twenty minutes for breakfast. American troopships issue two meals a day; British troopships what I call three and a half, the half being the cocoa and biscuits served to the mess decks at 2100 hours.

I was interested to find out why American troops generally disliked fish, and believe the explanation for 90 per cent. is that they live so far inland that they think all so-called fresh fish "suspect." About 10 per cent. are normal fish dislikers, and we ourselves could show about the same quota till this war established fish in the U.K. as a high-ranking luxury.

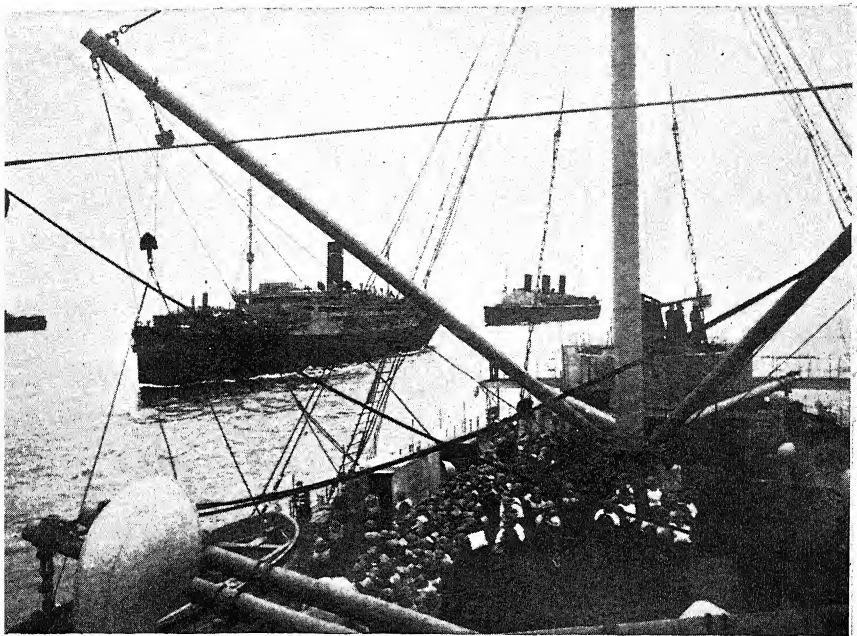
The weather in the Atlantic in the third and fourth weeks of October, 1942, was a little trying for any with



seasick leanings, and for a few days after sailing a number of passengers could not bear to think of food, let alone sit down at a mess table to eat. The inevitable super-appetite ensued, and we had no chickens, turkeys, or point steak. I heard quite a lot of "belly-aching," and so at breakfast one morning I said to the U.S. O.C. Troops: "Sir, let me fetch the Chief Steward along to our table as soon as he's finished his breakfast, and let us see if we can get our menus nearer your men's liking." The small conference assembled, and as go-between I felt I must open the proceedings. "Mr. C——," I said, addressing the Chief Steward, "our guests don't like some of our dishes. They didn't like their main course (fish) at breakfast today. It's no good wasting time at this stage with inquests on the past, so what's for their dinner?" "Thick beef soup, roast mutton . . ." He got no farther, for the American O.C. Troops said, "Mutton! Mutton's only fit to be fed to dawgs!" And I think that you will agree with my comment that we were talking different languages. At this point of time our Allies had only been in the war ten months, and these splendid fellows—mostly railway engineers—had been away from the land of plenty barely two months.

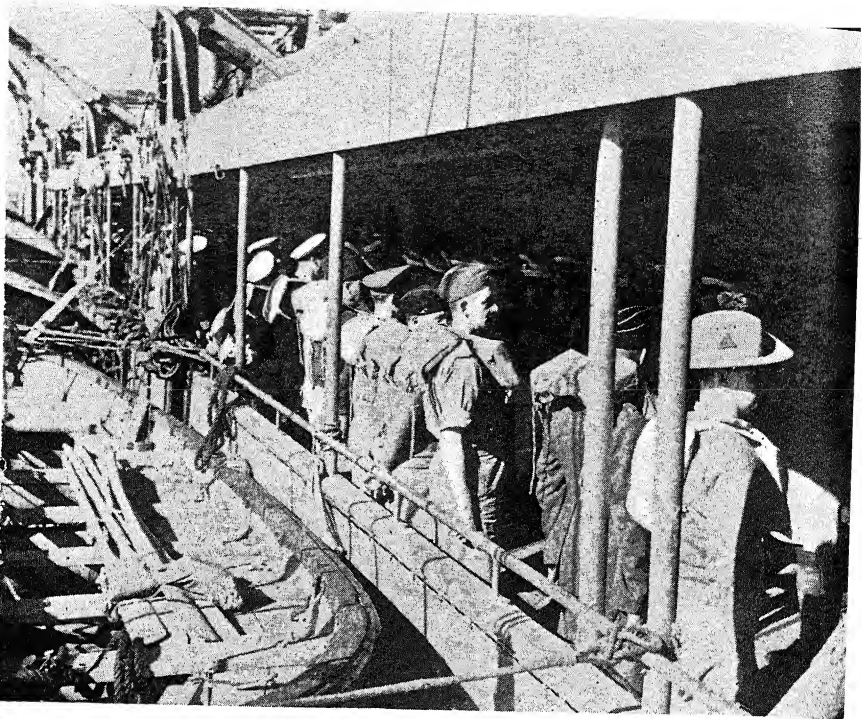
I knew that the roast mutton would be cold, except for a warm-up with hot gravy (the galley was cooking for twice the number it should have fed), so I dodged down after ship's inspections to talk with the head chef (an able Frenchman), and plead for some pickles to lend a piquancy to the despised flesh of sheep. He produced just over 100 lbs. of a first-class brand, and we got through that meal comfortably.

A few days out, and there was great speculation as to our destination. Well over a ton of maps and documents had come aboard under armed guards at Gourrock, and were stored in a very large cabin, with further armed



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TROOPSHIPS TAKING UP POSITION IN CONVOY



“BOAT STATIONS!”

*[Crown Copyright*

guards inside and outside the room. Some senior U.S. Staff Officers were aboard, and a very fine contingent of the U.S. Navy. The O.C. Troops, a large, happy person, who had done much railway construction in California and Mexico, contented himself by telling me gleefully at intervals, "The greatest strategic conception of all time!" Some thought Dakar, the Chief Steward banked on Casablanca; but about 2300 hours on the 6th November we passed through the Straits of Gibraltar. There was no moon, and we seemed to be hugging the African side, for Ceuta had loomed up in large silhouette just after 2200 hours. Before this we had seen the blaze of the Tangier lights in the southern distance, and had passed many Spanish and Moroccan fishing smacks between Tarifa and Ceuta. Our guests were very excited: they did not approve of the neutral shipping, they mistook our contact planes from Gibraltar for something hostile, and vociferously counselled action; but above all they wished to see Gibraltar.

It really was unfortunate that Ceuta showed first. I was on the boat deck for nearly two hours that night, doing my best to answer questions. Pointing south to Ceuta, quite a few said, "Are you sure, Colonel, that ain't the Rock?" I did my best to tell them of Ceuta, and that all Europe was on our left, all Africa on our right; that Ceuta was a well-known landmark more or less opposite Gibraltar and of the same rock formation. Then a couple of hefty young "lutenants" tried an old one on me. "Colonel," they said, "we've just seen a steward, and he says that is the rock." Then a staff officer, who had been a very quiet and patient watcher, asked, "Are you quite sure, Colonel, there's no channel between Gibraltar and the mainland?" Quite a number had been watching and waiting, and had gone below before Gibraltar itself loomed up on our port side—and in the

right place! The south side of the Rock, by which we now were passing, was blacked out perfectly. I'm glad I waited, for never have I seen that fortress of ours look more magnificently potent. The silhouette was there for all who had good sight. I pointed it out to a vast Texan captain standing next me by the rails. When he had picked it up he said slowly, "Frankly, Colonel, I'm disappointed. I've gotta mountain at the bottom of my garden four times the size of that goddam rock!"

We had been many days getting from the Clyde to Gibraltar. A year or so later I was told that on two successive days the convoy had the same noon rendezvous on the Atlantic! And the enemy submarines were sitting pretty round Dakar!

In the Mediterranean next day (7th November) we might have been on a pleasure cruise. The sunshine was delightful, the sea sparkling ultramarine, the many M.T.Bs. dashing around our periphery sparkled too. Otherwise the day was uneventful. We manoeuvred, it is said; in the manner of other convoys which had gone on to Malta, and the enemy in consequence postponed his reception of us for a day when we should be nearer his bases.

At a very early hour of 8th November we anchored off the small Algerian port of Arzeu. As daylight came, the Master and I had a great view of the activities ashore, and saw such exciting events as the capture of a battery of guns on the hills above the town by U.S. Rangers, and the entry of our smaller ships into the harbour. The fighting, such as it was, was over by 1200 hours. Almost four days elapsed before our complement of passengers had been landed. At this stage there was a distinct shortage of landing craft, and our efforts were hampered considerably by the heavy swell common in the afternoon and evening along the North African

shore. Those of you who are interested to understand this phenomenon can easily look it up. I remember seeing several soldiers waiting in the square by the star-board sally port look down at the sea through the sally port and vomit immediately—and they hadn't time to use their vomit bags (an issue)!



*[Drawn by a member of the American crew of the "J. W. MacAndrew"]*

CHAPTER FOUR  
SHIP TANNOY!\*

"TESTING, testing, testing the ship's broadcast system from the Monkey Island loudspeaker. One, two, three four . . . nine, zero. How did that come through in the Purser's Square, Sergeant-Major? in C/5, Sergeant-Major Hough? Telephone up, will you, please. . . . It is now 1655 hours and O.C. Troops will broadcast in fifteen minutes' time."

One learned by experience that it was desirable to get the ship's wireless officers to check up on the ship's tannoy frequently, and they took the trouble to test every loudspeaker once or more every voyage. As there were many scores of these, much tedious work was entailed.

The abuse of an internal broadcast system quickly leads to general aggravation. If you are trying to enjoy a decent kipper at breakfast, and an ear-splitting voice, devoid of any trace of inflection, shouts at short intervals, "7001832 Rifleman Short, P.Q.; go to the Orderly Room in D Deck Square immediately," you do not leave breakfast in the best mood for a happy day's work.

After three or four days at anchor in the Firth of Clyde we sail down that magnificent waterway. We pass Arran (Paddy's milestone) and soon turn north-west to make the waters between Rathlin Island and Islay. We have passed Bloody Foreland some time before my broadcast hour, and they don't want much today! But the hours of black-out and other routine matters must be given out, and I add :—

"The waiting at anchor was a holiday in a way, if a

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\* Internal Broadcast System.

little tedious. It got you used to ship's topography and routine under non-disturbing conditions. Today we do our best to accommodate the tempo of ship life and training to your somewhat uncertain and very varying stabilities. Tomorrow, make up your minds to go strong. Boat stations, lectures, etc., will all be on. Don't eat too much or too quickly, but regularly and well."

By the afternoon of the second day out the sea sickness is over, except for a minute number of allergics, and I risk a few humorous remarks on fieldcraft, and a warning, in anecdote form, against the incomplete use of mnemonics.

"Military Training Pamphlet No. 33 (Fieldcraft) should be read in conjunction with the Bible. The Boers were superior to us in fieldcraft, and they were without doubt better Bible readers.

"Noah, Jacob, Joshua: all these leaders of the ancient Levant were exponents of making the most of their surroundings, and correctly interpreting what indications and evidence natural phenomena handed them. Abraham with a job on 'always rose up early in the morning.'

"The parable of the Ten Virgins only wants three words changed to make it 100 per cent. infantry training. For 'Virgin' read 'recruit'; for 'lamp' read 'oil bottle'; and for 'bridegroom' read 'enemy.'

"Ever since you went to your first school you have been using various aids to memory in learning your lessons. You remember, for example, the old rhyme about the months beginning 'Thirty days hath September . . .'

"When C.O.E. C.D.O. came out as the code for personal cleansing (blister gases), some units said, 'Come on Everton, Chelsea's Down (and) Out'; others said, 'Church of England, Church Door Open.' These memory aids tickled the men, and most of them could



rattle off both. That done, an amazingly high percentage could go no farther.

"The letters actually stand for: Cotton waste, ointment, eyeshields, clothing, detectors, ointment.

"In January, 1942, I was inspecting the kits of a company stationed at Dovercourt. I always seized on kit inspection as an opportunity for simple Ts.O.E.T.,\* inquiries as to leave, etc., as I went along.

" 'Tell me,' I said to one man, 'the code letters for personal decontamination.' 'C.O.E. C.D.O.,' came the reply. 'Good,' I said, and turning to the next man, 'What do the letters stand for?' 'Church of England, Church Door Open,' came back the answer. I tried hard to explain that this was hardly a sound formula for the removal of mustard, but got us back to the six letters. However, No. 2 averred that they were the only words he had ever associated with the six letters.

"So I turned to the next man—No. 3 in the line of men by the large bay window of that seaside house—and said, 'Well, can you help out your comrade?' His answer, too, was prompt, and completely devoid of any suspicion of pertness or planned repartee. He said, 'I'm afraid not, sir; I'm a Catholic!'"

We were round about Iceland on the 21st of March, 1943, and quite a number of men of the three Services going there were middle-aged and wearing the ribbon of the last war. I have had the strongest of feelings about General Gough's treatment and the public maligning of the old Fifth Army ever since the sacrifice of the scapegoats in April, 1918, and so I pushed this small bit into my talk that day:—

"I greet all old comrades of the one-time much maligned Fifth Army of the last war who may be on this ship. We may be proud that we are doing our duty

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\* Tests of Elementary Training.

today just as we were on this day twenty-five years ago. It is a Silver Jubilee of which we may be doubly proud."

During the evening of that day I was greeted by several old veterans and many of the next generation were eager to know more of the great battles of March-May, 1918, when in the earlier war the Germans were swelled almost to bursting point with their triumphs and many folk at home were despondent.

As a vehicle for impersonal, unheated but completely effective correction the ship's tannoy is unsurpassed. Immediate action and forestalling are the lines to take.

In Gibraltar itself there was no black-out; in the Bay-Gib.-Algeciras it had to be maintained 100 per cent. (other pens will tell of the dangers and treacheries of that particular strip of water). We were bringing back troops who had been at Gibraltar some three years. We spent one night at anchor after they had embarked. It was an eerie night, with scores of us on the look-out throughout for one-man submarines and limpet mine-sowers. In the twilight some men were smoking on the weather deck. As we were not at sea this was not a grave offence, and was checked quickly by the ship's police as soon as they had been put wise to the matter.

Next day amongst other things these words came to everyone over the broadcast:—

"Whilst I was with the Master on the bridge some twenty minutes after black-out last night we saw upwards of twenty men smoking on the For'd Island Deck. This was very wrong. My rule since last November has been to treat anyone who commits a black-out offence on the ship as a temporary lunatic: the matter is too urgent and serious for palaver. There are eight inadequately padded cells constantly available for such temporarily unbalanced. There have been no cases this year. When you look at this beautiful convoy we are in you

will realize how the damage which could be caused by a single person aboard violating the black-out is beyond calculation.

"At 2310 hours I came upon three private soldiers gambling in a corner of the Sergeants' Lounge. As regards this and all other offences committed yesterday I was merciful. We are at sea now, and the days of grace for offences against Standing Orders are over. . . . The Master is delighted to think that, for the most part, this voyage can be a pleasure cruise for all of you who love the sea. For him and his officers who love and live for the sea every voyage is an unbroken period of vast strain. You can understand that this strain is greatest during the hours of darkness, and that the need for listening is imperative during these hours. It is, of course, just ordinarily decent to be quiet after 2300 hours, but on a troopship, in war time, urgent necessity entirely outstrips decency in its demands. The Bridge can't do its work if there is noise on 'A' Deck during the night."

"A" Deck was the home of the first- and second-class passengers and sometimes too they had to be exhorted to punctuality at meals:—

"In conclusion, one word to first- and second-class passengers. You must be punctual at meals. This ship, with no enlargement of peace-time cooking facilities, has to feed more than double its number of peace-time passengers. The best way of showing your appreciation of all the Chief Steward's department does for you is to be scrupulously punctual. Some of you may remember the famous Line which in peace time rang a gong at the beginning of each course. If you came in after the second gong, you didn't get the first course.

"A little Hitlerish, perhaps," I concluded, "and we have no wish to adopt it, but we can't do our best for you unless you are punctual."

## TROOPSHIP QUIZ

"THE preliminary round of the Quiz competition will be at 2000 hours tonight. It is run on the same knock-out lines as is the F.A. Cup Competition, and in proportion is just about as popular. We have twenty teams competing, and so there will be a preliminary round, two rounds proper, and a semi-final before we reach the final, which will be staged in the most public manner possible.

"Already I have eight question-masters, who have received instruction and played in a small demonstration quiz in my office.

"Teams are of six, and each mess deck will find one, so will the W.R.N.S., the R.N. officers, the Army officers, and the R.A.F. officers. Tonight there will be four matches only, and then tomorrow we shall have sixteen teams playing in the eight matches of the first round proper.

"Your mess deck officers are busy getting their sides together, and will explain just how we play quiz aboard this ship. Each competitor gets two questions in all, and the feature of our quiz is that we allow sides to huddle if the individual, honestly acknowledging that he doesn't know, says 'Huddle' instead of guessing. The correct answer from the individual scores two marks; from the huddle one mark. Time, thirty seconds for the individual, thirty extra seconds for the huddle."

That was usually part of my broadcast to the ship at tea-time on the day following embarkation, and at

five minutes to 8 p.m. the question-masters would draw the question papers—each in a sealed envelope—from my cabin. The zero hour had to be observed most strictly, for all papers were necessarily the same for all sides in any one round. By typing only the exact number required and by numbering the copies and by making the question-masters return them immediately the round was over, I was able to use the same question papers on subsequent voyages. To be quite frank, I used some papers for two and a quarter years!

So much in a quiz competition depends on the skill, fairness and patter of the question-master. Every voyage I emphasized that quiz is a game, not a “viva” to determine our professional ability, etc. Very occasionally a competitor would get a little “hetted” at a palpable bloomer of the member of his side, and I remember a very enthusiastic marine, as we were approaching Iceland, being quite angry with one of his team, who had a “sitter” with which he could have won the match, but shot very wide. But we were quickly all laughing again.

With twelve questions at two marks each, the maximum a side could make was 24. I don't think 20 was ever reached, and 13 to 14 was the average. Each question-master had to have a time-keeper and scorer, and we used the gong solely for the expiry time, and in consequence it wasn't used much. There were some very close matches indeed, and an account of two or three such finishes should be of interest.

The Army Officers were 15, and the R.A.F. Sergeants, with score  $13\frac{1}{2}$ , had one question to come. (The score was announced at quarter, half, three-quarters, and before the last question.) “Sergeant Banks,” I said, “if your side is to win you mustn't huddle. You have thirty seconds in which to think it out. Your many admirers and well-wishers will maintain absolute silence to help you. Now

tell me the name of the British scientist who enunciated the theory of the origin of species." Intenser and intenser grew the excitement in that crowded lounge as second followed second. Quite a few hundreds were packed in. My R.S.M. had proclaimed "Five seconds to go" fully three seconds before Sergeant Banks shouted out "Darwin," and the audience cheered and cheered. I was convinced that telepathy had quite a part in the R.A.F. victory.

The fact that an officer from Gibraltar only knew the names of four of Henry VIII's wives and had to "huddle" to get the other two gave a match to his opponents by a third of a mark.

The very best final of all took place on the way back from Ceylon in the spring of 1945. We had time to run two complete competitions; the first during the run from Colombo to Egypt, and the second between Port Said and home. The second series was tremendous. We started off with twenty-three teams, which included "Admiralty Civilians," "Nondescripts," etc. The "Nondescripts" were a formidable team, including University men, a peer of the realm, well-known staff officers from S.E.A.C.—and were knocked out at their first appearance.

The final round found both women's teams still going strong, and the match, Wren Officers *v.* Wren Ratings, was one of the greatest events of the voyage. When I went up with my warrant officers a few minutes to zero hour it looked as if we should never be able to reach the question-master's table, and might have to be passed over the heads of the assembly as casualties are passed over at football matches. But we wormed our way in, and the match started. To maintain equity it is a good thing to "pair" questions—*e.g.*, if A/3 got a Biblical question, so should B/3. In this important match almost

all questions were in pairs, and we had a tie—14 all. And so we started a third round of questions. "I will name two books to each of you, and you will tell me the authors." They were not particularly easy titles. I remember that "Two on a Tower" and "Mother India" were two of them. In turn each side huddled, and the Wren Ratings managed one book, the Wren Officers none, and so the Ratings won by half a mark, and received their prizes amidst the plaudits of hundreds of passengers—of all Services and civilians.

There were great challenge matches on the after-promenade deck during the voyage. Some of these took place while we were lying in the Gulf of Suez off Tewfik. These challenge sides were very "hot stuff," and each had a captain with almost encyclopædic knowledge. One of these captains was a Methodist missionary returning with his family after many years in the East. He never appeared in clerical garb, and he had led his side to complete victory before I knew of his calling. So when I suddenly asked this happy-faced, rotund cleric for Hedy Lamarr's birth-place, the crowd was more than amused. He didn't know, and his huddle produced "Budapest." As the *Egyptian Mail* sold in the ship the previous day had spoken of this lady as being born in Vienna, the crowd had no particular sympathy with them in their disaster.

The children returning from Ceylon, etc., with their parents were attractive, well behaved, and most appreciative of the sports and everything else arranged for them. They raised two teams—one of four girls and one of four boys—for quiz on more than one occasion, and they played their match on the open deck to the delight of their parents and such senior officers as Commanders, R.N., Colonels, and Wing Commanders. Further aft on the same deck I saw young Service men gladly doing nursemaid for any mother who would let them. They

loved the children and the babies, who undoubtedly were providing a very live "pre-touch" of home.

You may wonder what sort of questions caused so much interest in our quizzes, so here are a few—without their answers!

What is a great circle?

Campanology: what activity is so called?

Who composed the music of "Merrie England"?

Why are midshipmen called "snotties"?

What is the chemical name for Blue Stone?

Complete the line: "One crowded hour of glorious life . . ."

Ship's course is 225 degrees: in what direction is she sailing?

Curfew is the corruption of two French words. What are they?

Variety, equity and very clear speaking are essential. We turned out questions by the hundred, and now and then ran professional quizzes, which had a vast undercurrent of humour to sustain them. Indeed, a quiz based on K.R. (King's Regulations) can be very full of laughter. Running a quiz is my one and only "party trick," so you must pardon my extended exuberance about it.



"Add  $\frac{3}{4}$  and  $\frac{3}{4}$  for your present score—"  
THE AUTHOR—ACTING AS QUIZ-MASTER



## "TIN FISH" MISSED US

JUST as we talked consistently of an "emergency" when we meant a coming global war, so prolonged tussles with U-boats in mid-Atlantic and other tough seas were usually called "occurrences." I feel that I am not good at writing either drama or melodrama, and know that after World War I many folk found me disappointing as a blood-curdler. Battles, whether on land or sea, are stark horrible, and I'm certain that air combat, whatever its increased tempo, is equally beastly. But when writing of three years' experience as O.C. Troops, I have to agree that something must be said of enemy interferences and attempted interferences.

What had we to look out for? Submarines, mines, aeroplanes, and, in harbour, nasty things like limpet-sowers and one-man submarines. By the time I went to sea troopships had considerable armament of their own, and units coming aboard added many Bren guns to the basic complement. Look-outs were good, and, later on, Radar introduced a hitherto-unknown infallibility in the matter of detection. A troopship carried both depth charges and paravanes. The paravanes would be put out before we reached a channel like the Straits of Gibraltar, but we never, in my time, threw out a depth charge of our own. Our escort vessels—destroyers and corvettes—were ever intelligently active, and threw "patterns" of depth charges—at the right time and place so far as I personally was concerned, for I was never in the drink myself. Five or six depth charges going off simul-

taneously (a pattern) do shake one up a bit. Many old soldiers of 1914-18 will remember the cylindrical oil-drum trench-mortar bomb the Hun fired at us from reinforced wooden-barrelled trench mortars; a depth charge is a very similar looking missile, but catapulted, not fired from a barrel.

One got very used to depth charges, and it was a common reaction to tell inexperienced passengers that in all probability "the Asdic has got a shake up from a shoal of whales." It was unusual to sound any alarm when a destroyer put up its contact flag (large black rectangular), and tore up and down and around throwing patterns at frequent intervals. The following extract from one of my broadcasts during the voyage to Sicily (June-July, 1943) will indicate, better than anything I can write now, that the M.N. Captain was no alarmist:—

"The most alarming thing last evening was a boat stations order started up by word of mouth by some most irresponsible person. At the time I was with the Master. A cadet reported to him that one of the destroyers was showing a contact flag. The Master went to the bridge, telling me that there was no question of boat stations at present. I went out on the Captain's deck, and, to my astonishment, found boat stations parade starting. The Master wants to know if he is running his ship and ordering alarms as and when necessary, or is it being run by inexperienced sensationalists who, knowing or purporting to know various maritime signals, think they should issue orders to passengers? No, this sort of thing must NOT happen again. The lie put around that the ship's bells were out of action was the worst part of a bad show. I'm not apologizing to you for this mess up. It was due entirely to one or more irresponsible passengers.

"Immediately after this broadcast there will be horse-racing on the port promenade deck. . . ."

I have added<sup>3</sup> the start of the next paragraph just to show how smoothly and friendly our common life went on, in spite of occasional foolishness on the part of some individuals.

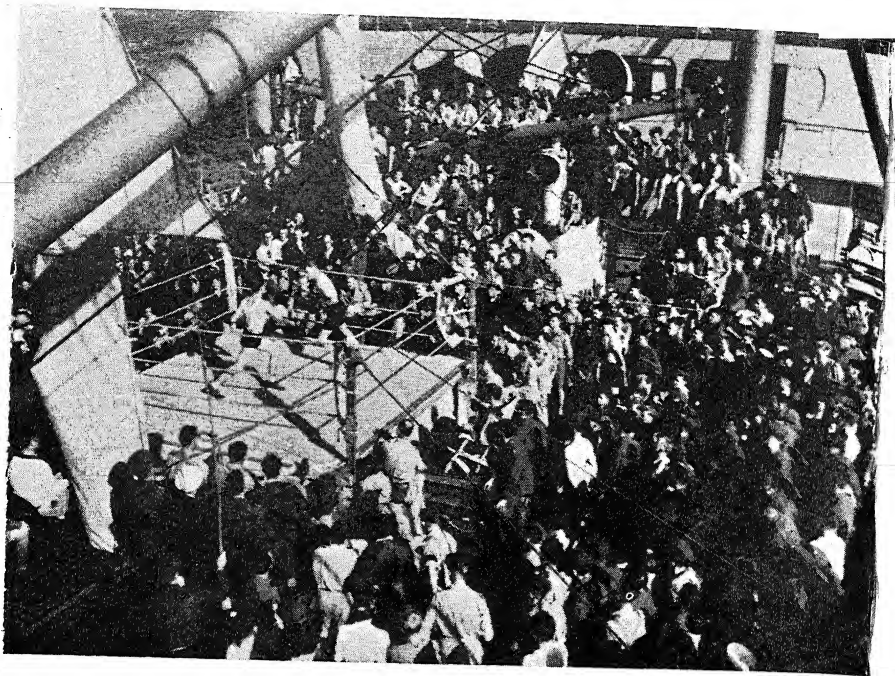
There were, in my time many more air alarms, both in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, than alarms for submarine attack. One day in the early summer of 1943 we had five air alarms, with three of these falling in meal times, and off we hustled, tying on our life-jackets and masticating a very large mouthful. The very last of those five attacks came after dinner, and another troopship was missed fore and aft by two bombs of a stick in this attack.

True we often were missed by night as well as by day, but there were some tough hours in many voyages. A couple of days after the North African landings, Mr. Churchill, in one of his great broadcasts—and this was one of the first in which he introduced a note of triumph—told the world that we had upwards of 800 ships engaged in this great new Allied operation. We heard it whilst at anchor off Arzeu, and long before we had finished debarking our Americans. “Lads,” I said, “think of us occasionally during the next week or so. Jerry knows that we have to get home, and we shall probably be having a tougher time at sea than you are ashore.” And so we did. We were attacked during the night 12th-13th November, whilst steaming (in convoy) from Arzeu to Gibraltar. No bells were rung—the ship had only one passenger, a young pilot of the Fleet Air Arm who had been shot down into the sea on the day of the landing, and we were taking him back to rejoin his carrier at Gibraltar—and I gathered that masterly navigation played a considerable part in ensuring that one torpedo passed in front of our bows and the other aft of the propellers. We had to oil at Gibraltar (14th



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"SECONDS OUT OF THE RING"

November), and I went ashore to send off cables for the hospital staff, my R.S.M., and myself. The weather was delightful. As G.M.T. was the time used throughout this operation by all taking part, Gibraltar time was an hour ahead of ours. From our anchorage we had a good view of Algeciras, and quite a few folk who lived there doubtlessly took a keen interest in our movements and those of the ships accompanying us. Soon after 1600 hours we were under way again. Our pilot passenger had debarked and we were passengerless. About 0400 hours, Sunday, 15th November, the bells rang out—seven short, one long—rousing the small Army complement from sound sleep. We were soon at our stations, and so were all members of the crew, for all who had turned in had done so fully clothed. We arrived at our stations in the midst of the excitement of a very active attack on the convoy. Rain was lashing down, the night was dark and cold. Emergence from the inside light to the perfect black-out of a weather deck under such conditions is difficult, especially for “old” eyes. My experience in this attack led me to work out the hang-on-coat-tails system for getting troops out to stations at night. I went down on all fours to find coamings and hook back doors on this occasion. Things were very tense for an hour or so; a carrier blowing up during a pitch-black period is a truly awful sight. Coloured light signals played a great part in directing our navigation for the next two hours. These were certainly epic, for, more than a year afterwards, I scribbled the following verses (for the ship’s Christmas magazine) to commemorate them:—

0400 HRS., 15TH NOV., 1942.

Alleyways darkened: no lights and no torches,  
Four in the morning and wind half a gale;  
Alarm bells a-ringing—hark! Everyone scorches  
To take up his station, and no one may fail.

*Avenger* is blown up. Now other ships sinking  
Quicken our heart-beats and hasten our feet;  
Will ours be the next on this night of reckoning?  
We strengthen our sinews the challenge to meet.

Tense at our stations we watch and we listen,  
Ready, aye ready for urgent command;  
Faces and oilskins with raindrops a-glisten;  
Thoughts as we wait are of loved ones on land.

After an hour or more sounds the dismissal;  
Down to the galley we hurry for tea.  
Follows the dawn, and we breathe a committal  
For comrades in ships now claimed by the sea.

On St. Patrick's Day, 1944, we were steaming along the Algerian coast, westward bound for Oran. The time was about 1000 hours, the morning magnificent. The ship was "light," and I was working away at statistics in my private office. There was a shake—not a very big one—and I said to myself, "That depth charge was a good way off." Another shake followed, and the alarm bells rang out at almost the same moment. We spent an hour at stations—glorious sun-bathing if you like—but we were watching with anxious hearts our two immediate neighbours in the convoy, both of which had been hit, and both of which eventually were lost. It would be quite easy to fill some pages with accounts of that hour. At the moment I will content myself with saying that the two persons I watched with the greatest interest were the debonair elderly purser who carried the ship's vital papers in a splendid pigskin brief-case, and the ship's butcher, who was nursing a pedigree wire-haired terrier which had been put aboard at Malta in August, 1943, for passage to U.K. (all papers in order), and we hadn't so far been home! This purser had come from the *Athenia*—he was her purser at the time that she was torpedoed (3rd September, 1939). He carried himself with the inspiring

confidence born of experience. Once again our luck was in.

One other bad night must be mentioned, and again 0400 hours was the time. In the third week of August, 1943, we went into Malta on a return voyage from Sicily, and there took on quite a load of passengers for the U.K. (time-expired men and their families, and there were many children). The attack came during our second night at sea, and the Master had "air attack" sounded (one short, one long—repeated—on that particular ship). This meant "tie on a lifebelt over warm clothing and wait in quarters." I had to go to the bridge on such occasions. As I passed along alleyways I looked into cabins. The order was perfect. Not a child barged out into the squares and alleyways; women and children were all wearing their life-jackets and squatting on the edges of the lower bunks. What was happening outside? Enemy aeroplanes were flying very low and dropping torpedoes, similar, so the experts told me, to those fired by submarines. Again we were very lucky: the "tin fish" missed us. The superb behaviour of the women and children passengers was duly commended in my daily broadcast. It is easy for the realist to say, "Oh, they'd had heaps of training and practice for three years or more in Malta," but such sturdiness in women and children was far above the average such hard-bitten ones as the Master and myself expected. Very worthy examples of British phlegm were those who came from George Cross Island.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### SHIP'S INSPECTION

1000 hrs.—ship's inspection.

1000 hrs.—boat stations.

So ran two lines in the middle of paragraph 1 (routine) of Ship's Standing Orders. The very first boat stations and surprise practice were at any hour; the daily drill cleared the mess decks of all Service men bar the mess deck officer, sergeant, and orderlies. Men and mess decks were thus assured of a thorough morning airing.

For thirty to forty minutes, then, each day, we had a touch of ceremonial. The inspecting party, which included the Chief Officer (representing the Master), the Troop Officer (the ship's officer who spent all his hours looking to matters concerning the troops), S.M.O. (Senior Medical Officer), Hygiene Officer, Ventilating Officer, Messing Officer, etc., formed up in the Purser's Square. We set off usually "on the dot," and, led by the ship's R.S.M., who sometimes was accompanied by a bugler, began our series of nosing visitations. "For'ard first" was almost invariably the rule in two ships in which I served, as this dovetailed in best with the current ship routine.

When the Navy is running a transport, the inspecting party is piped round by the Master-at-Arms. My staff loved to herald the approach of the inspecting party by the sounding of one G on a bugle. Some Masters didn't mind bugle blowing; others just wouldn't have it, and could produce a Sea Transport war-time instruction forbidding the use of trumpets and bugles at sea at any time anywhere in the ship. But bugle-blowing dies hard with

real diehards, and every now and again there would be an outburst—sometimes arranged, well aft, and many decks below the bridge.

I remember a very rough Sunday in the North Atlantic in mid-January, 1943. Two minutes to eleven, and I was climbing up on to a pile of rafts on the after promenade deck to get into a strong position to shout the morning service. A cadet appeared suddenly: "The Master's compliments, and will you come to the bridge at once, please." Off I doubled, to find that some bugling enthusiast had blown reveille below decks at 0630 hours, to the great discomfort of many of the ship's crew—particularly the engineer officers.

I continue to remember that Sunday morning vividly. The beam sea was considerable, and the ship rolled proportionately; there was no instrument of music of any sort, and the temperature was low, even for January. I pitched the hymns a bit low, and reduced the prayers to a minimum. There wasn't much life among the Service passengers for the next forty-eight hours.

The inspecting party is working for'ard on "B" deck, starb'd side. The small deck (B/I) reserved for sergeants comes first. I stand the mess deck at ease as soon as I've said "Good morning," and we split up to our various special duties: the S.M.O. to the mess utensils and tea-cloths, the Ventilating Officer to the blowers and extractors, and so forth.

I bring my little apple stick into very active use, for we cannot afford to allow any sweepings to be pushed under anywhere. Hammock racks have been built consistently in British transports so that there is a two-inch opening between the lower shelf and the deck. First morning the trash (U.S. for litter) my apple stick jerked out of the slit below the hammock rack was frequently a large and varied exhibit.

"What about the beans you had with your bacon this morning?" . . . "Do you want to change your deck's issue of library books?" . . . "Have you got your quiz team fixed for tonight?"

These were the type of domestic questions I fired at the troop deck sergeant as I ran him round his deck. If I hadn't visited the deck at breakfast time I asked him quite a few questions about that meal. 0700 hours is not a particularly good time to poke around a man's combined sleeping and dining quarters! Once I had a ship on which the men breakfasted at 0745 hours, and then I went to their breakfasts every morning, and the tales to be told of those visits shall be told when I write of messing.

There are many latrines and wash-places to visit. Latrine orderlies are about the most important of all the "employed men" on a troopship, and I think on every voyage I said this on more than one occasion:—

"The hygiene squads have worked excellently too, and my midnight scavenging expedition last night found things twenty times better than they were on the previous night."

That is a tiny extract from a ship's broadcast of March, 1943.

A Service inspection must have its ceremonial. As the inspecting party arrived at the top of the companion-way leading down to a mess deck one heard the mess deck officer shout, "Mess Deck C/4—'shun!" He then saluted me as I descended the stairs, and said, "Mr. Adams, Mess Deck Officer C/4, reporting mess deck ready for inspection, sir." The orderlies were dressed in line with the midship ends of their tables, and all wore either caps or no headdress at all: one must have uniformity one way or the other.

Mess decks, latrines, wash-places, lounges, alleyways,

canteens, galleys; a word with the potato peelers here and the store carrying party there, with the deck sweepers, bread store assistants, etc.; and finally a personal unheralded visit to the troop hospital. These all go to make up a ship's inspection.

Ten minutes after "dismiss" was my daily conference with unit or "group" commanders. The "group" organization was the one which we put into operation when we were carrying drafts and not units. Usually there wasn't much to discuss, for any troubles responded quickly to treatment in my daily broadcast. But the Chief Steward sent us in a large pot of tea and a few hard biscuits to refresh us after our rushing about below deck.

Twice weekly in *Letitia* the Master presented a large fruit cake to the best mess deck. After a time we decided not to say on what days the cake would be for competition, and so there could be no extra-special-specific-cake-grabbing efforts. One match-stalk, cigarette end, razor blade on a mess deck spelt immediate disqualification. Great was the competition. Have you ever watched stone-at-shovel throwing by adults on a beach on a summer afternoon? They wanted something to do, and stone-throwing fitted in splendidly.

So on long troopship voyages competitions between mess decks are wonderful energy outlets. A very famous regiment of Commandos we carried in February-March, 1943, took their maritime housewifery with unequalled zest. One of their deck commanders—later killed in Sicily—engaged a sign-writer to print on a blackboard, which was exhibited at the bottom of his companion-way on what turned out to be competition day—

#### THE BEST MESS DECK EVER

But he had forgotten the waggishness of the Commando Adjutant, who dropped a few match-stalks and cigarette

ends on the middle of the hatch in that deck two or three minutes before the inspecting party arrived. We all knew that Adjutant too well to be taken in, and the deck had the Captain's cake that day.

The average Britisher, young or old, does like a regular job of manual labour. If on a ship this leads to an extra snack, so much the better. In eighteen months' work on one troopship we carried some men twice. The mess I am thinking of especially belonged to the Somerset L.I. A hundred or so of them were in a draft for Gibraltar (from U.K.) in January, 1943, and we took the whole battalion from Gibraltar to Port Said just before Christmas of the same year. About an hour after embarkation in December my R.S.M. and the Chief Steward came to tell me that most of the galley and bakehouse fatigues were being done by Somerset men who had done them in January!

These jobs did bring an occasional extra mug of tea, but when next morning I found mess deck and latrine orderlies on exactly the same beats as eleven months before, I began to believe that *esprit de bateau* was a reality. I was surprised—and inwardly delighted—but I think the C.O. of the Somerset battalion, who had only just taken over command, was more so, and very pleased, too, to think he had been sent to command men who liked to do jobs well, and could show appreciation of a troopship which always wanted to be a "home from home"—even if it could only manage that when three parts empty. In every case these soldiers had asked to be given their old jobs, and their requests were in within a few minutes of embarkation!

The daily formal inspection at 1000 hours was indispensable, but I learned much more about everyone and everything during my solitary midnight prow. Here is

a note from my log, written on my return to my quarters one night some years ago:—

“Changing reliefs both below and above decks making too much noise. Unblocked washing-up tank after end ‘B’ Deck (used by C/5, C/6, D/6). Found three urinal flushes starboard side ‘B’ Deck turned off, and so turned them on (Field Officer of the Day reports that he had done the same at 2300 hours). Three sailors sitting at the top of their companionway smoking at 0010 hours—not up on duty, and should have been in their hammocks. Visited hospital: patients appeared all comfortable; one awake. Officers and sergeants of the watch around and doing work quietly and efficiently. Also the sergeant of the guard.”



[Drawn by Pte. A. Wyard  
*Scramble net Reminiscences*

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE VOYAGE TO SICILY

How many times in three years' trooping did we load up for a new operation, destination completely unknown? I have so far only written of the November, 1942, landing in North Africa. When in June, 1943, we were loading for the Sicily operation, there was a tense feeling of jubilant expectation running through the ship. Not many days had passed since the capture of Pantellaria, and it was clear to us that the embarkation of a complete docks operating group meant early capture of ports in some large pending operation. We had left Algiers before details were liberated to those not in the know, but as soon as news of the landing in Sicily on 10th July was broadcast at breakfast that day we all felt we should be in some Sicilian port before many days had passed—and we were.

Those three weeks spent between the Clyde and Sicily in the midsummer of 1943 will be ever memorable to me. Many of our passengers were out of the U.K. for the first time; many had worked in the docks of Le Havre, Brest, Nantes, during the B.E.F. days of 1939-40, and were stevedores of the highest attainment, great-hearted giants, who cleared our holds when we did anchor off Augusta as I'd never seen them emptied. Their quiet, happy, and very efficient C.O. is in peace-time a P.L.A. official, as well as an officer of the Supplementary Reserve. He was carrying out his specialist work as a soldier from the very first day of the war. It is just as

well to put it on record that our authorities had quite a number of such expert gentlemen on immediate call in the case of an "emergency."

Midsummer in the North Atlantic with D.S.T. in operation meant daylight till 1 a.m., and daylight again at 5 a.m. The weather was good, and fun and training fast and furious. In training aboard much was left to Os.C. Units and Draft Commanders, but three forms of training were run under ship's arrangements: P.T., gas, and scramble nets. A word about the last. They are large, square, and very strong nets, which in action and at landing anchorages are suspended down the sides of the ship at various points. Down them to lifeboats or landing craft scramble the Service passengers. If for operation, they must "scramble" fully equipped. Practice is essential, and on my ship exercises on scramble nets went on all day and every day. Fortunately aft there was a drop from the promenade deck into a well (two decks down), and this made an ideal practice place. Early practices were done "light"; for final practices everyone was operationally equipped, and that must always mean a fairly heavy and awkward load. On arrival we usually were able to put our load off by way of accommodation ladders—quite "peace-time"—but scramble net agility often proved invaluable. A scramble net always looked to me very much like a pig net grown big.

Of games we had a surfeit on that voyage, with great boxing tournaments as ever the chief draw. These are just the same aboard as they are in the barracks gymnasium, for we only staged them when the sea was smooth. Fights were almost exclusively for novices, and I saw scores of interesting bouts and much blood, but cannot recall the discovery of any prodigy—probably because a ring on an after promenade deck is not the ideal place for "class" boxing.



Tug-o'-war contests and horse-racing are games in no-wise impaired by a little pitching, though no games at all are possible in a heavy beam sea. Tug-o'-war is great fun anywhere and at any time, and the enthusiasm for and keen desire to learn this game shown by our many allies carried on various voyages established it as the pre-eminent troopship deck exercise and competition, boxing excluded.

A troopship horse-race meeting is an exciting gamble, with very limited stakes. A steeplechase course for six horses is marked out on a weather deck. This is roped off, and only "officials" are allowed inside. Six small wooden horses mounted on sticks about two feet high are the foci of the gamble. Two energetic and loud-voiced officers are detailed to cast the dice—large dice. The first throws his dice, and shouts "No. 2"; the second throws his dice, and shouts "Five"; and No. 2 horse moves forward five spaces. If at five the legend at the side of the track reads "False Start," back goes No. 2 to the starting post. "Broken rein" means miss the three next goes which fall to your horse . . . "Broken neck," you are out of the race altogether—and this happens about two steps from the winning post. The more hazards introduced, the more the fun and excitement.

On any one afternoon I liked four races to be the maximum, and would never allow more than six. The M.C. was given a good team, and we must have trained many able totalisator clerks in our many voyages. A horse could be bought for 2s., and a ticket on a horse cost 1s. When we had francs and lire in currency as well as sterling and B.M.A.\* notes, the totalisator gentlemen had a very busy time. When the passengers were

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\* B.M.A.—British Military Authority. A special note currency, ranging from one shilling to a pound, issued to British troops on the voyage to North Africa in 1942, and to Sicily in 1943.

mostly American, one dollar was the minimum stake, and members of the poorer English-speaking nations relegated themselves exclusively to the role of spectator. The fun was fast and furious throughout, and even sober-sided old fogies like myself sometimes made as much as 8s. during an afternoon!

And so for the first fortnight of our voyage to Sicily we were training and playing, inspecting kits, and swallowing the appointed doses of mepacrin—preventive treatment for malaria. We entered the Mediterranean about 7th July, and anchored at Algiers (tied up by the stern) on the evening of the 9th. Perfect security was maintained; no one went ashore. As we entered the harbour, two of our largest battleships with escorts left—was this the eve of the great new operation? It was: at breakfast next morning (10th July) the loudspeakers were telling us of a successful Allied landing in Sicily, and by evening security was relaxed a wee bit: an odd officer or two came aboard. No mail awaited us. We were at Algiers till 14th July, and the days were extremely hot. Few of the men had really experienced humid high temperatures before, and there was a deal of what the G.Is. call belly-aching. Fresh water was used excessively. On several occasions during this voyage I had to speak on the tannoy about water consumption.

“... The one outstanding matter on which you must educate yourselves at once is the use of fresh water. Most of you have been spoilt consistently from birth in the matter of pure fresh water. . . . Fresh water is, on active service, one of our greatest luxuries, and what you may at present regard as restrictions should prove to be a good initial training for you. We can manage up to 62 tons a day at present, but when the total used-exceeds 120 tons, as it did yesterday, something has to happen at once. Water is on now for four hours a day; if the

consumption does not drop to a reasonable figure at once the hours during which it is available will be reduced to two. . . .”

Four days later the heat was greater, and fresh water consumption remained too high.

“Water consumption is still too high; yesterday it was again over 100 tons. The Master has in consequence ordered a reduction of water hours. From this evening they will be . . .”

He knocked them down from four hours to three.

On Monday, 12th July, and Tuesday, 13th, we went for organized route marches in the Algiers district. The men enjoyed these, in spite of the heat, and the M.Ps., under a young officer ashore named Lieut. Hatton, arranged routes and marked them quite foolproofedly. On the afternoon of 13th July a Mobile Bath Unit was coming along to bath all of us on the quayside (salt water baths and showers cannot be used in dock or harbour), but we sailed a few hours too soon to enjoy this benefit. Algiers “Area,” from the Commander (a Brigadier) downwards, had done us proud, and the Chief Steward had been able to purchase fruit—chiefly oranges and lemons.

And now there was no doubt where we were going; and east of Algiers was a new sea to most of us. The troops had passed to the Eighth Army and Monty’s command when we left Algiers. First morning out on this second stage of our voyage they were told all about it:—

“For many months now the whole world has looked with either admiration or extreme envy on the achievements of the British Eighth Army, under its victorious and mercurial commander, Sir Bernard Montgomery. In picture houses wherever I’ve been this year his appearance on the screen in any film has evoked spontaneous applause. I have felt and taught all this year that the

greatest honour which can befall a unit is for it to be posted to the Eighth Army, and I have said that the first question in a soldier's daily self-examination should be, 'Am I fit and efficient enough to become a Montgomery soldier?' "

And then we read Monty's famous message to them. It was printed in every paper in July, 1943, and so I will but remind you of it by printing its first paragraph:—

"The time has now come to carry the war into Italy and into the continent of Europe. The Italian overseas Empire has been exterminated; we will now deal with the home country."

Uneventfully we steamed along the North African shore through the Galita Channel (single file), across the Gulf of Tunis, past Cap Bon and Pantellaria till we came to Malta. We anchored off Valetta on Saturday evening, 17th July, and remained there till the very early hours of the 19th. There was no communication with the shore and we had no enemy air visits. Sunday the 18th was a magnificent day. The short parade service was well attended, and in the evening there was a very moving community hymn-singing on the after promenade deck. A young R.N. commissioned bos'n (Noble) and an Army captain named Dykes were the prime movers in this. The singing they did at Algiers on the previous Sunday had set them alight for further and greater efforts, and the calm sea to the north-east of Valetta must have carried those harmonies far. Twelve or so officers were the nucleus of what became a vast male choir, and we all were the better physically as well as spiritually for those forty minutes' singing of sturdy melodies.

We did our best to teach the men Italian phrases and to tell them of the country to which they were going. Every man received a small handbook on Italy, and I issued a quiz based on it. Without causing mental

indigestion, we put across all we could in the time at our disposal. We were keen on getting all our passengers alive to the fact that practical hygiene in Sicily was a century or two behind our own:—

“... There is much more disease in Sicily than there is at home. While 50 in 1,000 is the figure for infant mortality in Great Britain, it is 164 in Catania. You will be told, too, about sandfly fever and rabies. Bombed dwellings are a happy breeding-ground for sandflies. Be clean, clean, clean. Cover up your excreta; don't think any old rubbish-heap will do for a urinal. . . . Soldiers attract dogs, but common sense says that in Sicily you will let dogs alone and you certainly should not start the usual adoption business. Sicily is not clear of rabies.”

Sunday, 18th July, was the fourth after Trinity that year. We weren't far from St. Paul's Bay. I had to get the S.M.O. to read my broadcast that day as my larynx had gone phut. I was disappointed, as I knew that it was the last real chance I should have to talk to this most interesting and unusual conglomerate of passengers.

“It's 1,900 years since St. Paul suffered in these parts. He was a great letter-writer. By these letters, which the Church calls the Epistles (*epistola* is the Latin for letter), he kept in touch with those of other lands to whom he had brought the Christian Faith. And so from Corinth he wrote to the Romans, ‘The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.’ This grand sentence occurs in the Epistle for today, and is one on which to meditate and build in these, the greatest days of our lives.

“I promised that today being Sunday and whilst you are lying off an island of such historic as well as immediate interest you should have read to you a certain narrative which tells of St. Paul's voyage from Palestine to Rome.

He had appealed—Saul of Tarsus was a citizen of Rome—for trial by Caesar. It was a very long voyage and I don't think that you would bear with the whole of the 27th and 28th chapters of Acts which recount it. There were 276 folk in all in the ship, and they had the dirtiest weather imaginable—storm, rain, no sun and no stars for days."

You may have time to read the whole of those two thrilling chapters. My doctor read xxvii, 41 to 44, and xxviii, 1, 2, 7, 10, 14.

"When we do sail from here we shall indeed be following the steps of St. Paul. I hope we'll get a chance to view Syracuse and that it won't be long before the Allies are in Rhegium (now Reggio di Calabria)."

Next day, in spite of air interference, we sailed into the port of Augusta and successfully landed every passenger with whom we had been entrusted.

## CHAPTER NINE

### MESSING AND SALVAGE

"COME and have a look at our soup-maker," I said on many a voyage on "P/5" at the conclusion of morning ship's inspection. And whomsoever I asked never failed to avail himself of the invitation. Six giant cauldrons in line next the after bulkhead in the galley, extending from the port side bulkhead to midships, and in charge of an ageing little Scot of gentle manners and kindly heart.

He must have spent quite five years of World War II making nourishing and delicious soups. He had a couple of the biggest wooden spoons I've ever seen, and was of such stature that he had to put a box in front of each cauldron and stand on it before he could successfully stir his precious soups.

Before she was a troopship, P/5 was an A.M.C. (Armed Merchant Cruiser). After being a troopship under various code numbers, she blossomed again as the largest hospital ship working to Canada, and as such carried home many thousands of wounded Canadians from E.T.O. (European Theatre of Operations).

My little Soup King must have made an average of 200 gallons or more of soup on quite 1,500 days of 1939-1945, and I expect that he is still doing it. His brother died at Port Said on 30th December, 1943, after forty-two years at sea. Sixty-odd M.N. officers and men went ashore to his funeral, with my adjutant and myself there to show the Army's admiration for this great Merchant Service of ours and our affection for a seafaring comrade.

You may say "What a life!" and the housewife who finds her varied cooking somewhat boring should take heart when she thinks of those six cauldrons and all the work which went to their daily filling and emptying. I counted this pale, whimsical little man a staunch supporter, and should have visited him more often had he not insisted on my sampling his current brand of soup every time I went near him. The soup was always excellent, but he gave it to me at almost boiling point in one of the large wooden spoons, whilst the temperature of the galley itself was usually far too hot to make soup drinking *in situ* a pleasure. But I did burn my mouth on more than one occasion to please him.

The soup-maker story puts across in a readily understandable manner the immensity of the problem of troopship feeding. Bread-baking, potato peeling, etc. etc., must all be thought of in like proportions, and most of these jobs had to be done in awkward places and at uncomfortable temperatures. If you have four ovens for bread-baking, and after nine months and no return to the United Kingdom two of them are burned through, what would you do when the folk ashore at your next loading port can do nothing about oven repairs?

I remember this problem at Oran in March, 1944. We were due to load to capacity with U.S. and French troops two days after reaching that port. The American General to whose command the U.S. troops belonged came on to see us on D—1. "Two ovens out of action," he said. "Well, say your total requirements of standard sized loaves for the voyage and divide by two, and that number of loaves will be put aboard tomorrow at 11 a.m."—and they were. Next time we put into Algiers the two weary ovens were renewed for our final voyage—Home.

The Chief Stewards with whom I worked were all keen

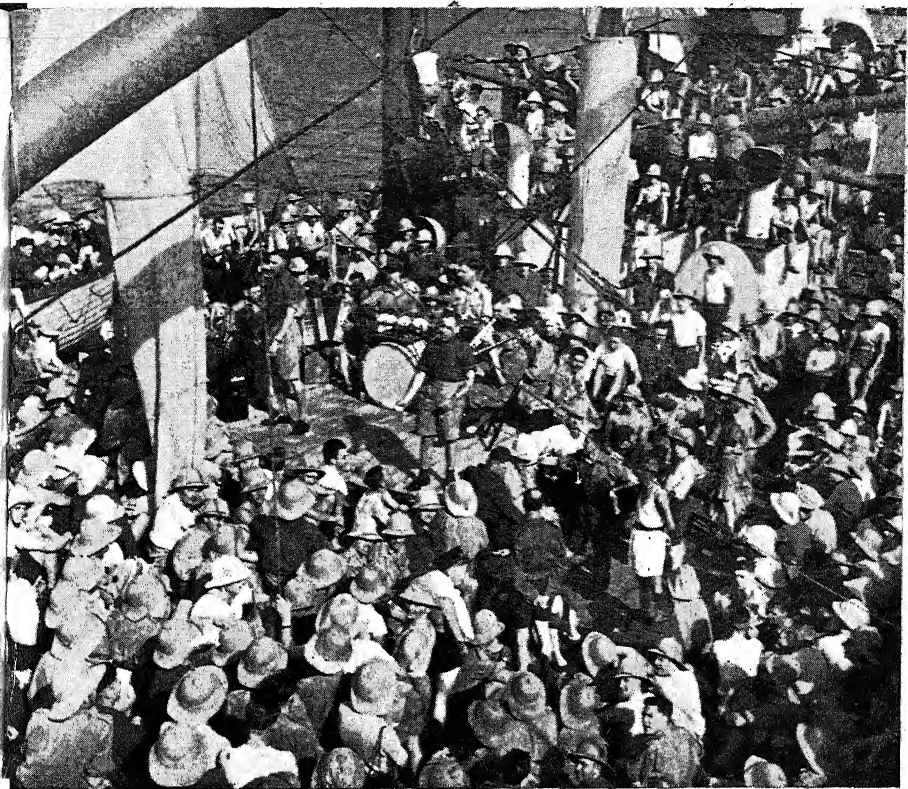


on doing their utmost for the troops they carried, and when the Chief Steward of *Letitia* was given an M.B.E. everyone who heard of it was delighted. He was very expert at getting one meal more into his passengers than they expected would come their way, and once at Glasgow, at an unexpected and rushed debarkation, he fed about 2,000 dinners to men in the sheds alongside the quay an hour or more after they had been put off, but were still waiting for land transport.

Every voyage we had a Messing Officer, carefully selected, and he had a daily mess meeting—one representative per mess deck. There were complaints on the way out, but none on homeward voyages. Indeed, Service men and wives of Service men returning from places like Malta sang loud praises of the ship's food. Early in February, 1943, there was a classic example of this praise, when just after midnight I caught an airman sentry outside my cabin entering up a diary. He had left Malta by air a few days earlier, and come aboard us at Gibraltar. The one redeeming entry read, "The food on this ship is simply heavenly." That group of officers and men put on a good deal of weight while with us, and as eggs had been 2s. 6d. apiece (when obtainable) during that winter in Malta, they certainly had not been overfed with luxuries on that island.

Breakfast: Porridge, kippers, bread and butter, tea. About every fourth day there was marmalade or jam as well. I've not seen butter on the same scale anywhere ashore. There was no "loose" sugar or milk served with the porridge. Sassenachs going out grumbled that the porridge wasn't sweet enough. The Scots replied, "You should take salt with it, and anyhow we can only allow twenty-five pounds of sugar each day for porridge."

Here is a short extract from a ship's broadcast of



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## SHIP'S CONCERT



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## PAY PARADE

February, 1943, which attempted to put messing complaints in their right perspective:—

“I have spent a good deal of time studying minutes of mess meetings. Some of the complaints were rather childish. I told you a few hours ago—I agree I might have told you earlier—that the galley in feeding about three thousand is strained to bursting point. Voyages on transports are operations of war, much more so, to my mind, than bivouacking in the hills above Oran. The troops we put ashore on Thursday are getting only two meals a day, and both of them come out of tins. . . . So when you come along to say that the potatoes issued are not all the same size, think of your comrades in North Africa who are getting no fresh potatoes at all. When you complain that your porridge is not sweet enough in spite of the twenty-five pounds of sugar cooked in it daily, remember the sugar ration at home, and that the Scots always take salt with their porridge.”

Tea dust makes a poor brew—the colour is deep, but taste is missing—and as you arrive near the bottom of a tea-chest there is dust, and it must be used. Somewhere in the Indian Ocean early in 1945 as I walked around the Mess Deck breakfasts one morning, I was bombarded with complaints about the tea. I sampled twelve separate mugs from different messes, and all were devoid of taste, although the colour was satisfactory. So I took the Assistant Chief Steward a mug filled with many samples. The men had no cause to complain again. Troopships are proud of their good names.

Another morning in March, 1945. The mess decks were down for smoked haddock as their main breakfast dish. We had had slices of the same fish in the first-class saloon the previous day, and it was delicious. Table (mess) after table on four mess decks were delighted with their haddock, but there was a group of twelve men sitting

together at a mess on the starboard side of the fifth deck I visited who hadn't eaten their portions and clearly weren't going to do so.

"What's the matter with your bits of fish?" I asked. "I've seen over six hundred men already who are enjoying it."

"We don't like it," replied the obvious ringleader, "and we don't intend to eat it."

"It's from exactly the same lot of fish I had yesterday, and my bit was excellent."

"You call it haddock," came the reply, "and it ain't: I'm a fishmonger."

As there was a chorus of requests from the neighbouring messes for the unwanted portions, I was able, with a completely clear conscience, to go to my own breakfast of "London Haddie" and enjoy it. Quite a number of senior officers enjoyed the fishmonger story, and two days later—as a bright young Wing Commander pointed out to me—I was slow not to retaliate with "Are you a butcher?" when one of my old soldier passengers complained that there was too much bread in the sausages that morning! But once more his peers around him made such earnest requests to help out him and his supporters that the complaint could not be regarded as sustained.

We did our best every day and in every weather to avoid waste, and No. 5 hatch was devoted to salvage. The main items for salvage were paper, tins, bottles, wooden boxes. Swill was impossible, and there was quite a lot of it. The Army has chased swill so generally and for so long that every soldier is "swill-minded." "Now about swill . . ." I said to a new lot of Service passengers somewhere in the Red Sea, and they with one consent laughed loud and long. That was in 1945. In 1942 I was for a time concerned about the amount of swill we were throwing over at nightfall, and thought

we might advantageously install refrigerators for swill, and so enable the pig population of the United Kingdom to be increased. The following extract from a letter to my "master" at the War Office shows how useless one's enthusiasm may be sometimes:—

"During my time ashore, 20th December to 3rd January, I discussed this question with a large pig farmer in Essex, and he is of the opinion that as pig production in England is at present there is no point in attempting to save swill aboard troopships.

"A pig is suckled by its mother for the first two months of its life; it then feeds on meal preparations for three months, and when five months old can start on swill. There is adequate swill available now for all the pigs that can be bred on the meal allowed. Unless the meal supply is increased, and, in consequence, more pigs can be bred, any attempt to increase swill availability is so much wasted effort."

Salvage at sea was encompassed with a cloud of difficulties. It was not difficult to get an enthusiastic (temporary appointment) salvage officer and team. They worked deep down in No. 5, and so tin washing was more than awkward. We brought home all bar the wooden boxes. When we landed in North Africa in 1942 there was a complete famine of boxes and cartons, and R.A.S.C. officers in charge of D.I.Ds. (Detail Issue Depots) found their work much handicapped in consequence. I laid on a drill for all empty wooden boxes to be stripped, the constituent boards to be tied together, and the nails rolled in paper and tied on. By this plan we could store a vastly greater number. It happened about once. On short runs (seven to ten days) we could house the boxes as they were; on long periods away from home salvage became a nuisance.

We left the United Kingdom in June, 1943, full of

salvage fervour. The Mediterranean was very hot; Egyptian ports were hotter. Between Glasgow and Sicily No. 5 hold was half filled, and the team debarked on 19th July. We went to Alexandria, we went to Malta, Algiers, Djelli, Oran, Salerno, Port Said. Nowhere was there both time and opportunity to empty No. 5. We were in Port Said at the end of September. Large feluccas were engaged by the agents, and native labour in abundance struggled with No. 5 for two long days. The Master said, "No more salvage after this," and I concurred without demur. When we at length reached the Clyde again (April, 1944) I still had a quota of rats in my cabin whenever it was dark.

Earlier on there had been struggles to get salvage taken off in home ports, and I remember early in 1943 finding a patch of hundreds of broken bottles between some railway lines in King George V Dock, Glasgow. We always demand "flexible minds" in the Service, and troopship messing and salvage certainly demand flexibility—and a sense of humour.

## CHAPTER TEN

### RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

AN O.C. Troops on a transport in war time is very much a Jack of all trades. I told my superiors at the War Office on more than one occasion that officers engaged in this work should wear khaki trousers, a blue B.D. blouse, and a Thomas Cook blue and gold cylindrical hat.

Organized worship, the Anglican Liturgy, hymnology have interested me always, and such knowledge and practice as I had of them stood me in good stead throughout my period afloat. I can remember voyages with as many as fourteen padres aboard, and just about as many without a parson of any description, and then not only had I to organize services but conduct the non-denominational ones.

On a voyage to a landing or to an established theatre of operations voluntary Sunday services were well attended. I should say without hesitation that American soldiers cared more for church services aboard than did our less mercurial men of the Line. And of all soldiers the coloured American troops and our Maoris were those who appreciated common worship the most. I well remember a voyage from Oran to the Salerno Beach in September, 1943. The passengers in the Troop Decks were all coloured troops, and there were four coloured chaplains plus a Scotsman, who was an American Baptist missionary, and a Mormon. All were sincere and fine men.



When I held my "chapter" as a kind of lay-all-denomination-bishop I told them that I knew of their men's love of church services and that they could have two services on Sunday morning on a certain large weather deck—one at 9, the other at 11. "But," I said, "the routine of the ship must go on, so I will give you the hour by which your services must end: the 9 o'clock at 9.50, for Ship's Inspection and Boat Stations are at 10; the 11 o'clock at 11.50, as Mess Dinners are at 12." Rows and rows of ebony-coloured giants crowded the deck and sat in well-dressed ranks on neatly folded life-jackets (American: life-preservers). They sang melodiously, with a special liking for their song, "The old-time religion is good enough for me." It was "Good Samaritan" Sunday, and as I read the lesson at the 11 o'clock service ("Can't we have two lessons?" asked the negro chaplains) I asked to read this gospel. It suited the very dynamic coloured padre who was to preach, and he spoke as eloquently as he was sincere. The æsthetic-looking Mormon chaplain was the compere for the service, and I was fearing that a fulsome introduction of myself would make me feel uncomfortable before I read that beautiful parable, but he "let me off light," and I was able to give my whole mind and being to the part I had to take in the service.

On another voyage in the Mediterranean I had a further load of coloured troops, but no chaplain at all. On Saturday morning I saw their C.O., and he said, "Colonel, there's a fine buck-sergeant in that outfit who's a lay preacher. I will send him to you to fix up." The sergeant came to my office, and a grand specimen he was with his lively face, bright eyes and perfect teeth. He sat down very comfortably and we commenced talking of the service for the morrow. Then I remembered that I had not offered my visitor anything to smoke, so I

held out my table box of cigarettes. "No, thank you, sar," he said most charmingly, "I only smoke seegars."

One Sunday evening in July, 1942, when we were anchored off Aden, I saw two Mohammedans perform their evening devotions on No. 3 Hatch on the very place where at ten in the morning the Italian P.W. had placed their altar for their Catholic service. The members of both these religions appeared to me to be equally sincere and complete in their devotions.

My semi-religious duty which struck me as bordering on the humorous was my self-appointed task of verger to the Jews. My cabin office would hold 16 to 20 folk standing or kneeling, and every Friday evening at sea I put it at the disposal of the Jews from 2000 to 2050 hours. As I thought it only decent temporarily to remove all Christian manuals, etc., I virtually was their verger. There was no need for them to say that they appreciated my kindness, for my interpretation of War Office instructions was that it was my duty to give up this cabin of mine quite often to the padres, and I endeavoured to foster all religions quite impartially.

I will finish by saying something about the Roman Catholics. The Catholics always have been first-class at pastoral work, and I could mention a number of illustrative anecdotes on this score. The one very charming gift of which I write now was a pre-war one to a certain Bibby Line ship. The gift, a complete Mass kit, was made some two years before the war by a Catholic Women's Guild in Liverpool. When I went aboard this ship a week before D Day the purser handed over the box to me, and it lived in my inner cabin all the time I was on the ship. The Catholic Chaplains made the greatest possible use of it, and as we at times had as many as six Catholic Chaplains aboard a great many Masses were said. My R.S.M. was an R.C., and took Catholic prayers at

0915 hours every Sunday if no R.C. padre was aboard. At ports like Plymouth and Southampton he made contact with local priests and obtained fresh supplies of wafers and sacramental wine.

I have always wanted the good women of the Liverpool Guild who gave that beautifully appointed Mass kit to the Bibby Line ship *Cheshire* in days of peace to know what a blessing it proved to thousands of Service men and women in time of war. Perhaps someone who reads this and is interested will let them know. One day from my log I will determine just how many Masses were said aboard between D—4 and Christmas in our journeyings in the English Channel.

It must have been the first Sunday in February, 1943. We had left Gibraltar a couple of days on our way home with a few hundred souls—a very mixed bag indeed: all the Services, Poles, Free French, men and women who had escaped from all sorts of places in Europe and by one way and another had reached Gibraltar and liberty.

I remember one woman who had managed to effect a get-away from Brussels mid-September, 1942, among the party, and we also had the wife of a Sergeant-Major who had left Malta by air less than twelve hours before the time she left Gibraltar as a passenger with us. Quite a number of folk on that voyage had come from Malta by air to await a passage to the United Kingdom by sea.

Many of those who mostly had footed it from Central Europe by way of the Pyrenees had spent various periods in Spanish lock-ups and prisons, and had been “treated rough” (six months later refugees who came the same way told of much better and quite expeditious treatment).

Amongst our relatively small complement of passengers were two R.C. priests from Malta and four young missionaries who had been working for a few years somewhere in Madagascar or Portuguese East



*[Crown Copyright*

SUNBATHING ON THE HATCH OF THE  
WELL-DECK



[Crown Copyright

“NEXT STOP, DURBAN”

Africa. There were no Anglican or Free Church ministers aboard, and so I had to take service for the non-Catholic population. Just as I left my office to go to the lounge, which was rigged as a church on Sunday mornings, the R.C. priests met me to say that the missionaries were being given free passages by the authorities concerned, but that they hadn't a penny of ready money between them, and couldn't even indulge in a box of our cigarettes—some of which were then 1s. 3d. for 50! I told the parsons to come back to me when I returned from service.

As up to that voyage I had only been concerned with Service men going to battle-fronts, there had never been a collection at these family services aboard. For some weeks I had read the flock some short address, either by C. S. Lewis or Dom Bernard.

On this occasion, instead of such a reading, I just read the Parable of the Good Samaritan, and said: "There are on this ship at the present time four young missionaries. They have had a rough time. Our Government has arranged their passages to the U.K., but they haven't a penny of ready money between them. And so when they are put ashore at Gourock no one of them can put a bag in the cloak-room without begging threepence of a passer-by. Our country undoubtedly will be good hosts in due course.

"Those of us here this morning will be the advance guard of the official hosts, and put up a little money to make their first entry into our homeland free of the indignities of indigence. As you leave the lounge, please put a little in the adjutant's glengarry. I am not asking you to finance these young men for life."

The hymns that morning had been accompanied by a great fiddler—Corporal Abbott, a former member of Roy Fox's band. He was one of the most helpful persons

who ever came aboard. He played his fiddle whenever and wherever he was asked, and we all delighted in his genius. An L.A.C. who accompanied Abbott excellently at tea-time recitals was not so successful as a church organist, and apart from first and final chords his efforts that morning were certainly off the record, and I hope that by now he has realized that a grand tune like "Hanover" is not improved by swing treatment.

But this pianist had a great heart, and within an hour of the end of the service had whipped up nearly £6 from those on his mess deck who hadn't been to church.

To keep things in perspective I refused big sums and cheques. I sent for the spokesman to give him the money. He took it, and returned almost immediately to ask if the missionaries might come in personally to thank me. I pointed out that I was merely an intermediary, but that they could come. They were most courteous and sincere men, and I encouraged them to talk of their experiences and forget about the small matter of the morning's present to them. "If we are not to talk about it, please may we shake hands with you?" said their spokesman. I'm afraid I'd quite forgotten that I was what the Americans call a "ranking" officer, and that these strangers to ship life might be a little in awe of me!

Only the day before I had crossed swords with the two R.C. priests from Malta. Saturday morning I had sent for them to ask at what hours they wished to say Mass on the morrow.

"Have you an Altar Stone on the ship?" they asked. This was the very first time that this question had cropped up, and I had to adjourn to see the Purser. "No," said the Purser, "we haven't had an Altar Stone since the days of our cruises in peace-time." (The ship had been an A.M.C. during the first two years of war.) "We have no Altar Stone with us," said the priests, "and without

such a stone there can be no Mass.” I said that there were more than 200 R.Cs. aboard, and that many of them—members of the crew—had had no chance to hear Mass for six weeks, and that we were in dangerous waters. Nothing could be done in the matter of Mass, but they did have Catholic prayers quite early on the Sunday, and my log says that these were said in Polish, French and English.

All Service R.C. Chaplains who came aboard were adequately equipped, and never again did I have the experience of having only civilian R.C. padres and no Relic and consequently no Mass. To me a unique arrangement obtained with R.C. Chaplains of the U.S. Army: if no other denominations had Chaplains aboard, the American R.C. Chaplains not only said a maximum of Masses, but in addition ran non-denominational services for Christians of all complexions.



## ÉLITE TROOPS—LECTURE PROGRAMMES

To finish off my observations on religious services aboard a transport during World War II, I wish to say, for the interest of those who belong to the Established Church (U.S.: Episcopalian), that the service which attracted the biggest and most energetic congregation was "Parish Church Evensong."

The 3rd Infantry Brigade was crossing from Bizerta to Taranto during the first week-end of December, 1943, and travelling with those troops was their Brigade Commander, Brigadier "Jimmy" James, formerly of the K.S.L.I. His Anglican padres had found the men of those three magnificent battalions which made up this grand brigade of the 1st Division—the brigade which in early June had taken Pantellaria—liked an evening service as near as possible to the one in the village church at home.

They had an organist and a choir; they sang a psalm, the Magnificat, and the Nunc Dimittis; the padres said the Collects without making any tiresome alterations of words or phrases; the Brigadier read the lessons.

The lounge was packed to suffocation, and as a perfect black-out had been on for nearly an hour when the service started we sweated a bit, especially when we sang vigorously. It was a great service.

Brigadier James was killed in action in Italy in 1944.

A voyage of a few days with such an Infantry Brigade as the 3rd was a pleasure and a tonic. These troops landed at Taranto on 7th December, 1943, and they fell in on,

and marched away from, the quay with barrack-square precision. Not long after them came the 10th Infantry Brigade of the 3rd Division. This brigade embarked at Alexandria, and went to Naples. Again three very fine battalions, and very few men had a dull moment that voyage. With Commanding Officers who were so completely in sympathy with all that was "laid on" for their men that each was captain of his battalion's quiz team in a great three-sided final contest, there couldn't but be a real verve about all that went on during the voyage.

On a transport, as in trenches, one is very conscious that there are twenty-four hours to every day and 168 hours in a week. In a crowded mess deck on a foul-weather day conditions can be trying. "Break up the day as much as you can" was my rule on every voyage. Going down Southampton Water, Spithead, or the Solent, with emergency drills over for the day, it was easy to interest our U.S. friends—particularly the ladies—in Netley Hospital, Calshot, Cowes, Osborne House, Ryde.

"On our port side now (you call it left side) is Netley Hospital, the biggest military hospital in England; nearly a mile frontage on Southampton Water, and for some time now all American. We've handed you our very biggest. . . . Look carefully on your right side now, and you will very soon see the twin towers of Osborne House appear. That's the house where, on 22nd January, 1901, the old Queen died." (At this stage of my career I suggested that my uniform should be entirely Thomas Cook & Sons.)

On long voyages there was much training, and it took some fitting in. Often the only classrooms were companion-ways (ladders), and many is the class I remember of 12 to 16 soldiers squatting on the stairs with an earnest instructor at the bottom. Unit Commanders looked

after their own training, but often the ship had its own C.S.M.I. for P.T., and he saw that everyone had at least twenty minutes' P.T. every day. On Saturday mornings we wore respirators for fifteen minutes on an alarm ordered by myself, and we unrolled and hung up our anti-gas capes for six hours.

In the evenings on many voyages we had 1800 hours as a general lecture hour, with a lecture on every mess deck. To make these an attraction as well as a success, my Education Officer had to establish a panel of twelve to fifteen really good lecturers. By switching the lecturers round we had ample for a fortnight: 1800-1845 hours was a "quiet" time. The lecturer talked for thirty minutes, and then fifteen minutes were allowed for questions. I allowed no truants. Here are the subjects which were put across on one voyage to North Africa:—

The Dieppe Raid.

The Vaagso Raid.

Air-Sea Rescue.

Bomb Disposal.

Old Crocks (Ancient Motor Cars).

Anglo-American Co-operation.

Building Motor Boats and Making Model Ships.

Experiences in Russia.

Pre-war Germany.

The Treatment of Casualties in France, 1939-1940.

Tunnelling.

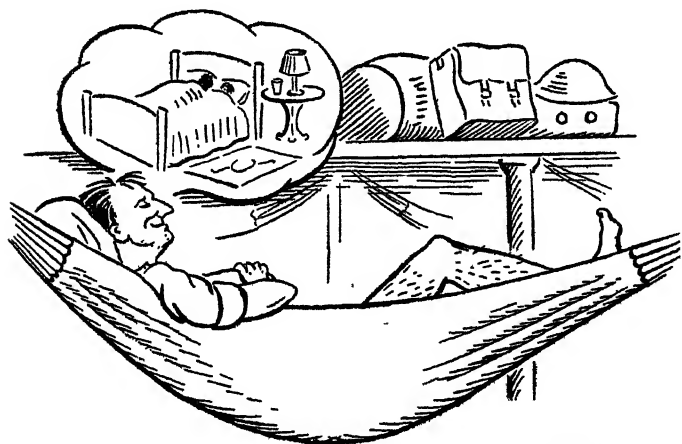
The lecturer in every case knew his stuff—generally by first-hand experience. "Air-Sea Rescue," for example, was by a Pilot Officer of the R.A.F. who had been on many errands of rescue; "Tunnelling" by a sapper then on his way with his company to help in making the new city inside the Rock of Gibraltar.

Troops returning to the United Kingdom were not

treated to training lectures, but they would queue for half an hour to get in to such a lecture as "The Sinking of the *Bismarck*"—a lecture which on my last voyage home from Ceylon had to be given three times by a certain Commander, R.N., who was a gunnery staff officer on one of our ships in that famous battle and is a very fine lecturer.

Break up the day—and the more you break it up with items which stimulate mental effort, the more the Service men of today like it. If you are carrying 3,000 passengers, and 600 is the maximum number that can be packed into the biggest saloon or lounge available for a brains trust, debate or quiz, you will find a queue formed fully half an hour before the doors open.

The mess decks can find a fair number of competent speakers nowadays, and provide ample questions for twice weekly brains trusts.



[Drawn by Pte. A. Wyard

*Fifteen years in a double bed takes some forgetting!*

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### D DAY

MANY a time in peace days had I been held up in my car by the bridge over the docks at North Woolwich. In all my work on H.M. transports in these war years only once have I loaded in the London docks, and that once was for D Day, and the whole experience was a superlative thrill, from the moment personal orders reached me late on Whit-Monday evening till we up-anchored off Arromanches on D+1 afternoon.

We were "sealed" in the docks as the troops were in their many camps. Those signs bearing the words "Marching Troops" and an arrow one saw about the near-dock roads spoke volumes of confident purposefulness. We loaded on 2nd June with Canadian and 51st Division men, and two minutes after the last man was aboard we had cast off and were slowly moving out of King George V Dock.

That road bridge swung round to let us through, and hundreds of employees, mostly of Harland & Wolff, lined the sides of the narrow waterway, through which our speed was necessarily slow, to cheer and cheer. They knew D Day was near, and their enthusiastic cheers were a very real encouragement. In five and a half years' active service in World War II this was the only occasion on which I was privileged to hear fighting men spontaneously cheered to the echo on their way to battle. In World War I it happened so often on both sides of the Channel.

We sailed that Friday afternoon past many posts on the Thames-side front for which Essex troops had found guards in the "blitz" days: Purfleet, Thameshaven, Canvey, Tilbury, Pitsea, Isle of Grain. . . . We anchored somewhere off Shoeburyness till the morning of D Day. There were several transports hanging about, and our ship was given quite a famous B.B.C. man with a technical assistant. They made records of our service on "Waiting" Sunday—which happened to be Trinity Sunday—and of many other happenings.

On Monday, 5th June, in the late afternoon, it was pretty obvious to us all, as we saw ships of many kinds and many sizes slipping through the Boom, way down beyond Shoeburyness, that something was about to happen, and next morning on the eight o'clock news, which came through just before we sailed, we knew it had.

A little later as we approached North Foreland we met a returning destroyer, obviously going up to Sheerness to refit. On her deck were many grimy, cheerful sailors, and they shouted to us in triumphant unison, "We've had our go; you get on with your bit." The sight of that destroyer and its exulting sailors fairly set us on fire, so when some minutes later the convoy began to turn back a wave of disappointment swept through all of us.

Within half an hour it was clear that we were describing a huge circle, and that our leader was already steaming south again. We were between the North and South Forelands when this time-table correcting manoeuvre took place, and as we rounded South Foreland we found we were screened on our port side by a superlative smoke screen—a great wall of dense smoke, whose width and height I did not estimate. Escort ships made the basic part of it, but wherever there was a concavity in its top

an aeroplane swooped down and belched out smoke to fill it up.

Dover harbour was empty of ships, and so—so far as one could see—was that at Folkestone. Between Dover and Folkestone, immediately after tea, we had our final tug-of-war for the voyage. On our port side was the immense smoke screen, on our starboard some form of artillery practice (into the sea) was going on near Hythe.

Some months afterwards my Adjutant said to me: "That tug-of-war you ran off Folkestone on D Day was the nearest thing to Drake's bowls match I'm ever likely to see, and I wonder the B.B.C. chaps didn't put it in War Report." What I remembered most about it was that two officers turned up with rubber-soled shoes, and had to be sent away to change into ammunition boots to make the game quite fair, and that the large contraptions erected on the deck to provide power for the electrical davits were horribly in the way. I had had much better tug-of-war "grounds" on my other ships!

In July, 1943, I was on the first large troopship to enter the port of Augusta in Sicily. Just as we passed through the narrow Italian-made boom we were bombed by two daring Italian airplanes.

On D Day, 1944, as we steamed along inside that marvellous smoke wall between Dover and Folkestone, we expected lots of things, and none of them happened. No shelling from Cap Grisnez, no bombing from the air, no submarines, no odd floating mines. Yes, we were lucky, and by the afternoon of D+1 we realized how much we owed this complete freedom from dangerous interference to our sister Services. But we took no risks on D Day, and our Master told me to order troops to wear Board of Trade life-jackets all the time. To see two hundred-odd officers of the British Army eating soup over the very protuberant pad of a life-jacket was

to witness an acrobatic feat *en masse*. Porridge on the morning of D+1 provided a similar spectacle. The long-armed were the best equipped for this form of feeding!

Not only did the Master order constant life-jacket wearing; he told me that the loud-speaker system must not be used during the voyage, and so the last news we had to think about was the brief and very incomplete account of the first landings which we had heard at 0900 hours. By 2100 hours, when we were somewhere near the Isle of Wight, everyone was longing to know how the first day had really gone, but it looked as if we should arrive off our beach early on D+1 not knowing what the first twenty-four hours had seen accomplished. And then at 2145 hours the chief wireless officer picked up this message on the set on which wireless watch was being kept:—

“Troops appear to be well established ashore, and have captured a number of points, including bridges, which the enemy have been unable to blow up.

“Airborne troops landed on a scale never seen before. Four thousand ships and a few thousand smaller craft have already crossed the Channel.”

This could not be read over the Tannoy, so I sent for the officers in charge of Mess Decks, armed each with a copy, and bade them tell their men before reading the message out that absolute silence must be maintained throughout the remainder of the voyage. And weren't we all thankful to get that heartening report!

A few days later we were allowed to use our general broadcast system again, and then, like you ashore, we enjoyed “War Report,” but no one of these ever brought us such comfort and satisfaction as our D Day picked-up report.

Everyone slept fully clothed and booted, but the night was completely devoid of incident. Reveille was at



0500 hours, breakfast at 0600, and by 0700 everyone was ready to disembark. At this hour troops changed from Board of Trade life-jackets to Mae Wests—every soldier had one of these in his invasion equipment. We found we were steaming down a channel marked out with large buoys—a perfect race-course it looked. Some of these were bell buoys, and many navigators in beach convoys must have thought thankfully of the splendid sailors who marked out those channels during the night preceding D Day.

We were slowly approaching one of the British beaches. Vast quantities of shipping were to be seen anchored off in lines roughly parallel to the shore. Battleships here and there were busy with long-range bombardments of special targets, and Allied aircraft constantly streamed overhead.

At 0955 hours large red flags were hoisted on the R.N. ships—air raid warning. All not on duty took cover, and this state of expectancy lasted for twenty minutes, but we saw no enemy aircraft. During our roughly six-hour stay off the British beaches on D+1 there were five of these warnings, all of which proved negative. And in thirty trips to Normandy on the same transport I cannot remember once seeing an enemy aeroplane, and no bomb was ever dropped anywhere near us.

Adverse winds and seas frequently necessitated several days of waiting fully loaded, and during most nights of such periods we heard enemy bombs exploding on the beaches two or three miles away. Our complete mastery of the air before the operation began is well shown by the fact that enemy aircraft did not attempt to interfere with the movement of our transports—crowded with troops—from South England to the beaches.

Occasionally Asdic picked up submarines, and escorts threw patterns of depth charges, but our chief worry from

June to December was the odd mines. Odd seems to me the best adjective: there was the mine which had broken away from its moorings in a gale, the mine attached to floating wreckage, the pressure mine, and others of which experts will write. I had seen the horns of floating mines several times before: near Iceland, near Bizerta, in fact everywhere we went. We kept a keen look-out for them, and fired with rifles and machine-guns at their "horns" to put them off. In June, July and August, 1944, we had orders to fire at all patches of suspicious wreckage which came our way. As the gunners (D.E.M.S.) had no aircraft to shoot at, they were glad of the diversion, and shot freely, but I cannot remember those on our ship getting a positive!

Landing craft awaited our arrival on this first occasion, and were alongside just five minutes after we had dropped anchor. Many small craft came, and as we had only two accommodation ladders descent to the majority of the L.C.As. was by way of Jacob's ladders—the rope-sided ladders with wooden steps by which normally pilots come and go. These are not an ideal descent route for a soldier fully equipped for battle, and by our third visit to the beaches we were putting our passengers into L.C.T.s which carried 500 easily, and to which descent was made comfortably by accommodation ladder and a platform suspended at its foot from which the men could step off easily into the craft.

Our first debarkation (U.S. language) occupied 3 hours 55 minutes, and considering it took place under several unexpected difficulties was a good show.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### HOMEWARD BOUND!

I HAVE written of many phases of troopship life, from embarkation to submarine attack, from soup-making to horse-racing. There remain two matters of which something must be said, and they are discipline and homecoming.

Of discipline there is little to write. In three years I never once had to use my authority to convene a field general court-martial for any offence committed aboard ship. And this happy state of affairs was not arrived at by systematic conniving. Men were a little naughty sometimes: they would smoke when they shouldn't, they would run round not carrying a life-jacket, and they would interfere with the ventilating system.

A dislike of forced air is no particular dislike of the British soldier; Italians, both in the prisoner and co-belligerent stages, hated it heartily. In winter time, on the Atlantic, if a blower couldn't be completely turned off, one or more Army socks could be extracted from it, almost without fail, at morning's ship inspection. In hot climes the bayonet was used at times to lift inspection plates from ventilating shafting to increase the air flow to the bayonet user's particular section of mess deck!

There were other less general petty offences, but of major troubles I had no personal experience. Sometimes we had Guards, sometimes Commandos, sometimes Dock Operating Groups, sometimes Goums.\* The consistently good and helpful behaviour speaks

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\* French North African Native Troops.

volumes for the officers, warrant officers and non-commissioned officers of the 1942-1945 armies. Troopships from October, 1942, were "dry" almost always, but I would add in capital letters that on the few occasions we were allowed a "wet" voyage (Iceland and Gibraltar runs, for example), we had no consequent disciplinary cases amongst British Service personnel.

Homeward bound! Many of my readers who belong to my own generation will have been soldiers in 1914-1918, and so remember the since unparalleled joy on relief from the line in front of Ypres or La Boisselle, and the bliss of returning to England for a first short leave, say in 1915! I remember myself being given a horse at the Bapaume Barrier in Albert one October day in 1915, and told to hustle off to Buire to arrange billets for part of the battalion. As a solitary and quick-moving individual I was able to take the high road (Route Nationale, and in view of the enemy), whilst the men had to come along by the low road (the Ancre valley). And I sang the whole way to Buire, with many a canter on the verge, too!

Such memories put one in mind to appreciate the immense joy and thrill of return from long periods overseas—periods often in which hardship and horror have been chronic. I think of the hundreds coming home from Malta after three years of great privation and upwards of a thousand enemy raids; of the hundreds who somehow made their way from occupied European countries to Gibraltar; of warriors whose tasks in North Africa, Sicily and Italy were completed, and who were wanted home before D Day.

Once we had a tragic setback on what would have been a most thrilling embarkation. We had been in the Mediterranean nine long months, ferrying North African veteran units to Taranto, Naples, etc., and at last we were

really to come home—and full up with wonderful troops. On a Friday afternoon in March, 1944, we had a good disembarkation at Naples, and received the “dope” for embarkation to start 0630 hours on the morrow. One excellent advance party came aboard; the whole atmosphere was electric; the crew bursting with excitement and willingness.

At 2145 hours the highest medical authority intervened: a member of the crew put ashore that afternoon was diagnosed “small-pox.” By 2300 hours all aboard had either been vaccinated or were standing in the tag-end of one of the three queues (two army doctors and the ship’s surgeon). There were no conscientious objectors and there were no further cases of the trouble. We had to stay in the Mediterranean for two or three extra jobs, and the unfortunate advance party were dumped in an American quarantine camp in the hills above Oran when we got there a few days later. They eventually came back to us at Algiers early in April, and we did then bring them and some two and a half thousand others home quite successfully. A fearsome skull and crossbones was the large centre-piece to the ornamental gateway of the U.S. camp.

I was standing by the rail on the promenade deck one glorious afternoon in February, 1943—we had just sailed from Gibraltar for home. Two girls in the early twenties who had come aboard an hour or so before were talking. A small Glaswegian steward came along, and said to one of them, “Your baggage is all right now, miss, and if you go along to the lounge in ten minutes you’ll get a cup of tea.” “Isn’t it wonderful to be called ‘miss’ and spoken to politely again!” said the girl Jimmy had addressed, to her companion. Since June, 1940, when, as two of the English girls in Paris at the time of the Hun’s arrival, they had received many indignities, they had

had a consistently rough time, and never a courtesy.

Jimmy was a happy lad: always smiling and about when wanted, hair too long (which "put me off" him for months), no discriminator as regards jobs, and a capable French linguist. A Catholic by religion, he willingly imposed on himself the duty of having a lounge ready for Mass—and another for Church of England Communion—whenever required in the early morning.

French is the *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean. Early in the war I believed some form of Esperanto imperative if a non-inflammable understanding between nations was ever to become a reality. Except for the Goums, I managed to get myself across to my passengers without the help of an intermediary—good English and indifferent French are almost enough. The Greeks in Alexandria and Port Said are amazing linguists with the purveyors of bazaars in the latter port, perfect examples of the pentecostal tradition. Many of you will have been to Buddha's bazaar, not far up the main road from Gate 6. He manages thirteen languages very well, he told me, and I believe him, and he is a very honest trader.

"Brush up your French," would be one of my first rules for improving understanding between European nations. I found nearly ten per cent. of my first batch of Italian prisoners of war had a French-speaking capability about equal to my own, so we got along famously. One of Hitler's rules for purifying the master race appears to have been forbidding the rising generation to learn to speak any language other than German. The only German O.R. I came across who could speak fluent English had spent most of his life in Rhodesia, and hadn't a vestige of "Hun" in his make-up.

An embarkation at Glasgow or Liverpool was often done in a day. Home-coming from Algiers in April, 1944, we took three days to get our passengers aboard, and still

had a few hundreds to pick up at Gibraltar. There were naval drafts, R.A.F., time-expired soldiers, units required for the Normandy invasion, Italian co-belligerents, German prisoners of war, French artillery, Poles, Czechs, Captain D'Arcy's famous U.S. Military Band, and all sorts and conditions of oddments.

The whole load was for the United Kingdom, and so one of the first jobs was to exchange money—francs, lire, dollars, etc. Local paymasters came aboard to attend to this; the Purser kindly lent his office in the main square for as long as we wanted it; and every hour or so till the job was finished we tannoyed the newcomers as to the urgency of getting money exchanged.

Good Friday was the main embarkation day on this voyage, and I prefaced my broadcast of welcome with these words:—

“This is Good Friday—the fifth Good Friday of the present war. We all have had a busy day, with little or no time to consider what the first Good Friday should have ensured for a Christian world. But all of us, captive as well as free, have had cause to appreciate the meaning of sacrifice and devotion in the days of duty through which we have lived recently.”

And late in the evening we managed to hold a short service, which was taken by a Presbyterian Chaplain, who had a cosmopolitan congregation.

We sailed away on Easter Eve, after having landed—in the nick of time—a stowaway: an American soldier due to embark on the next ship, but such a hustler that he made a very good effort at getting away on ours. This escapade, related in detail, would make a chapter in itself, and for about half an hour it looked as though a ship's search and roll call were inevitable—but our luck was in.

Easter Day was heralded by American trumpeters on

the after deck, and Captain D'Arcy's Band led the hymn singing at the weather deck services. Every possible game and entertainment was arranged and appreciated, and a tiny but good E.N.S.A. party (five in all) worked very hard for us. We had forty-eight hours of really bad beam seas two days from home, and weather deck amusements and recreation suffered a total eclipse in consequence. By this time all were excitedly discussing probable arrival, disembarkation, and customs officers.

Probably a few extracts from my last broadcast aboard on such a voyage is the tidiest way to round off this final chapter:—

“Cold as you may be, you have undoubtedly enjoyed this day of the voyage more than any other. From day-break, land—the homeland of many of us—has been in sight, and I hope you will all get to your homes, relations and friends with all speed. What happens to you when you disembark does not come within my province. I hope those of you who have been away from home a long time will be treated generously in the matter of leave, and that you will enjoy it to the full.

“This broadcast is a parade, because on every voyage I am ordered to address a few words (and they are very solemn words) to all Service passengers on the most vital subject of security. On outward voyages I do this as soon as possible after embarkation is complete. This is very necessary, as the desire then to write letters is a most burning one, and, as you know, all correspondence has to be censored. On a homeward voyage the letter question does not arise, and I am not going to reel off a lot of rules about letter-writing at sea.

“The big point I want to ram home to you now, a few hours before you disembark, is this: the safety of this ship after you leave her is largely in your hands. Talk is much more dangerous than are letters. We can hold



your letters up for seven or more days, and so make anything you write rather stale news; what you say in conversation ashore can do great harm. . . . Forget what ships you have been with, when you sailed, where you landed, and everything like that. We want to keep every ship possible afloat. If the enemy can find out details of our recent voyages, he can make very good guesses as to the dates of our future movements. We have brought you home safely, and the best way of showing your thanks is so to guard your tongues that we may go on carrying other troops—your comrades—in safety. Remember all day and every day that the destruction of our shipping is the only way now left for the Hun to get us down. . . .

"I thank everyone who has helped to make this voyage so successful. What we owe to the Master, officers and crew of a transport like this, I as a soldier cannot express. A ship and its navigation are still great mysteries to me, but I can say 'Thank you, very much,' on your behalf. . . .

"The outstanding feature of the voyage has been the instant assimilation of our troopship life by our allies. They co-operated nobly, enthusiastically, and spontaneously, both in work and play; best mess deck, won tug-o'-war, chess, and duplicate bridge. I hope they will disembark with as happy memories of us as we have of them.

"Tonight you may smoke on weather decks and you may sleep in your pyjamas.

"Good-evening. Bon soir."

APPENDIX

THE SHIP SHAPE SHOW  
ON BOARD H.M. TROOPSHIP ON CONVOY  
Script of Item 15 on the Programme.

"YOU LUCKY PEOPLE!"

WITH SIR RALPH RICHARDSON

LOUDLY SUPPORTED BY MICHAEL POWELL

*(The scene is in the O.C.'s Cabin.)*

*The O.C. is discovered in his dressing-gown; a towel is wrapped turban-wise around his massive head, he has his back to the audience and his legs straddled, he is shaving. Enter his Adjutant, LIEUT. NIGEL FITZURSE, carrying a cup of tea in his left hand. He comes smartly to a halt about half a pace from the O.C. After a moment he salutes.*

FITZURSE (bellows): Your broadcast, sir!

O.C. (gives a volcanic start and turns, his heart beating violently): You ass, Fitzurse! Don't shout like that! What is it? What do you want?

F. (extending wrist): Time for your broadcast, sir.

O.C.: 1710? So it is! So it is! (He turns, ruminating): Ah!

F. (putting down teacup carefully on table, salutes, screaming) And your tea, sir! (Exits smartly.)

O.C. (reacting with ferocity, picks up the tin waste-paper box and hurls it after his Adjutant): Noisy brute! (Fumbles for a while) Let me see! Let me see! (shouts) Fitzurse! (F. entering inquiringly) Bring me the rough notes for my broadcast.

F. (salutes smartly): Yessah! (Exits.)

O.C. (upsets his cup of tea, then calms himself by a puff on his pipe).

F. (*staggering in with two packing cases full of paper*): Your rough notes, sir!

O.C. (*testily*): Put them down, then, put them down!

F.: Yessah! (*Puts boxes on the table.*)

O.C. (*aiming a wild kick at him*) And gettout!

F. (*salutes*): Yessah! (*Exits.*)

O.C. (*dives into his boxes, gets tangled up*): Fitzurse, you ass!

F. (*entering*): Sir?

O.C. (*furious*): Get me out of this! These aren't my notes! These are last year's quiz questions.

F.: Really, sir? Sorry, sir! (*Extracts the O.C. from the foam of papers and boxes which has somehow formed around him, indicates second box*) Here, sir! (*Exits.*)

O.C. (*aiming a kick at him*): You ass, Fitzurse! (*Fumbles around, lathers his face with shaving brush, broods, switches on microphone*) This is Tuesday, the 25th May! Black-out will be from 1066 to the Fall of the Roman Empire! (*Consults notes.*) Many of you in this ship do not realize how lucky you are. On my last voyage we embarked 40,000 troops and on the way out we were becalmed for two years! During that time we ate the Adjutant! What a tough guy! You on this ship are fortunate in having a particularly tender specimen of Adjutant! After the calm came the wind: it blew and blew and blew, it blew blue murder! And we'd eaten everything except our tropical kit—you lucky people! (*He turns aside and picks up a military cap.*) Now I wish to address myself individually to the people on board. To the Army (*putting on cap*) I say: Keep fit. (*Takes off military hat and picks up a naval one.*) To the Navy (*putting on cap*) I say: Keep wet! (*Takes off naval cap and puts on cloth*

*cap*) To the civilians (*putting on cap*) I say: Keep out! (*Then putting on all three caps at once*) You lucky people!

Next about whales! The greatest peril you are likely to encounter in these waters on which we sail is the peril of whales. Against this peril I have devised a special warning on the alarm bell—two long and one short. For the purpose of exercise only I will now demonstrate the wall whaling—the whale walling—the wailing wall—the — the wooly will — the whirling . . . (*bellows for help*) Fitzarse, you urse! (*F. enters hurriedly. O.C. addresses him in despair*) Get me out of this! Quick! What do I mean?

F. (*salutes and answers with bell-like clarity*): Whale warning, sir!

O.C. (*throwing something at him*): Whale warning! I will now demonstrate the whale warning! Two longs and one short! Fitzurse, you ass! (*F. salutes, demonstrates with bell-push two longs, one short. Then he puts the bell-push down on the table, where the O.C. promptly puts his elbow on it. It rings deafeningly. F. reacts, so does the O.C., who is just saying*) That is satisfactory. (*O.C. menaces Fitzurse, then announces*) Once again I will demonstrate the whale warning—two longs and one short. (*F. demonstrates the whale warning, two longs and one short, but this time the bell sticks and goes on ringing to the visible horror of F., who shakes it, tries to stop it. Finally the O.C. kicks him and the bell stops at once.*)

O.C. (*trembling with rage*): For the last time (*whisper*)—You ass, Fitzurse!—I will demonstrate the whale warning—two longs and one short! (*This time all goes well, but the over-anxious Fitzurse puts the bell out of the way on to the O.C.'s chair, where he promptly sits on it. It rings violently. Fitzurse hastily exits. The O.C. leaps up, chokes,*

*throws the bell after his Adjutant, collapses in despair)* In future the whale warning will be one long wail!

O.C. (*he consults his notes*): Finally, I must speak of the rats on board this ship. You will understand that I mean the concert party! During one of my midnight prowls (*he prowls violently round and round the table*) I discovered the members of the concert party on the forward hatch. I can only hope that what was taking place was only a rehearsal. One last word! (*He lathers his shaving brush in the shaving water*) One final word which I must always tell you—about water! Don't waste it! You lucky people! (*He absent-mindedly gulps down his shaving water with immediate results—quick exit.*)





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